



NORMAN SINCLAIR

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CONTENTS OF THE THIRD VOLUME.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE PLOT THICKENS	1
II. MR EWINS IN TRIBULATION	14
III. A DISCLOSURE.....	27
IV. THE STRONG MAN BOWED DOWN	47
V. AN UNEXPECTED CONFIDENCE	63
VI. A DETECTIVE OFFICER	76
VII. MR POCOCK ON SOCIAL SCIENCE	90
VIII. THE RACE-DAY AT TORCASTER	98
IX. THE RUNNING FOR THE QUEEN'S PLATE.....	115
X. MURDER WILL OUT	123
XI. MR POCOCK IS INTRODUCED TO REBECCA.....	136
XII. EXPLANATIONS OF VARIOUS KINDS	155
XIII. SHEARAWAY TAKES HIS DEPARTURE	170
XIV. HOAXING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES	176
XV. IN WHICH SOME OF THE CHARACTERS ARE WITHDRAWN ...	197
XVI. LUMLEY'S AMATORY EXPERIENCES	205
XVII. A POLITICAL CRISIS	223
XVIII. THE PROPOSAL	236
XIX. NEW CANDIDATES IN THE FIELD	242
XX. ANOTHER VISIT TO WILBURY	251
XXI. RETRIBUTION	264
XXII. CONCLUSION	291

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CHAPTER I.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

THE affair of the mysterious operations on the Stock Exchange seemed to pass from the public mind without exciting any further notice. It was, indeed, alluded to in the House of Commons ; but the inuendo was met by one of those vehement protestations of the absolute perfection of every part of the official machinery which it is so difficult to answer, unless the accuser is prepared with a specific charge and fortified by the strongest evidence.

“ I take it upon myself, with the utmost confidence,” said Sir George Smoothly, who appeared on this occasion as the champion of red-tape, “ to assert that at no former period, nor under any previous administration, was the public service performed with such singular purity as now. Not only is the work of the different departments intrusted to gentlemen of the highest

honour, most upright character, and most approved fidelity; but such a system of checks has been devised, and is now in full operation, as, were I at liberty to explain their nature—which, however, cannot be done without impairing their efficiency—would set at rest the doubts and calm the apprehensions of even the most captious critic. Her Majesty's Ministers have no reason whatever to repress scrutiny or to shrink from investigation. Conscious of their own rectitude, and firmly believing in the integrity of their subordinates, they are ready to meet any distinct and articulate accusation; but they will not be so wanting in their duty to their Sovereign, their country, and themselves, as to attach the slightest importance to a vulgar rumour, which, like the vapours generated from corruption, is at once phosphorescent and unclean!"

From this specimen it will be seen that Sir George was improving in oratory, being now able to handle a metaphor with impunity—whereas, a few months previously, he durst no more have attempted such a feat than have tried to pluck a lighted fuse from a bomb-shell. The explanation is that he was now in training for a seat in the Cabinet—a place of dignity which, according to his ideas, required the adoption of a loftier style of eloquence than was suitable for the use of a subordinate functionary. He carried his point, however, and no further discussion took place.

Calling one day on my friend Mr Shearaway, I found him in sad tribulation.

"I am glad you have looked in, Norman," he said,

“for, to tell you the truth, I was just going to seek you. Things are far worse than I supposed. That wretched creature, Jamie Littlewoo, has made a moon-light flitting.”

“Do you mean to say he has quitted London?”

“Just so; and has left no more trace of his whereabouts than a fish does in the water. He has not even had the grace or common decency to resign his situation; for when I called yesterday at the office of the Board of Trade, they told me that he had been absent for more than a week without leave, and that he was as good as cashiered. Thinking that the misfortunate lad might possibly be ill, I posted off to his lodgings; but no sooner did the landlady hear whom I was asking for than she gripped hold of me, as ye may have seen a cat stick its claws into a rotten—whirled me, *nolens volens*, into the parlour—and then setting her back to the door, asked what relation I might be to the base blackguard who had been devouring the widow’s substance? It was long before I could pacify her so far as to get at the actual story; but when I heard it, I really could not but make some allowance for the woman’s passion. It seems that for the last three months she never saw the colour of his money, though that was not for want of asking; but he aye put her off with one excuse or another, until one evening, about ten days ago, when she happened to be out, a black-looking fellow, who, she says, was never out of Jamie’s room, and led him into all sorts of mischief, came to the door in a cab; and the two between them

carried down his boxes, that were ready packed, and drove off without leaving any message. I asked if any letters addressed to him had arrived since then. 'Letters!' cried she, pointing to a whole heap of them; 'there are letters enough, to be sure; but it's my opinion they are all of one sort—unpaid tradesmen's bills!' And troth, Norman, I believe she was right; for they were very like the kind of documents that come dropping in about the end of the year, to the discomfiture of many an unthrifty household."

"And you learned nothing more concerning him?"

"I heard a great deal, Norman, that I should be sorry to repeat. Drinking, dicing, and drabbing, have been the ruin of him; and if he had possessed the constitution of a Highland chairman, instead of being a shilpit creature at the best, he could not have stood it much longer. I was really sorry for the woman, who, bating that she was somewhat long in the tongue (which, however, is a fault not uncommon to her sex), seemed a decent kind of body; and I somewhat comforted her by the assurance that his father was a respectable gentleman, and would doubtless in the long-run see that she incurred no loss. I have just finished a letter to my partner, in which I have told him exactly how the matter stands; and now I really am at a loss to know what further should be done."

"I think, Mr Shearaway, it would be possible to trace him out, if you consider that advisable."

"It is not only advisable, Norman, but the right thing to do. Granting that he is a black sheep—a fact which,

I fear, will not brook denial—it behoves us to remember that we are all in some sort sheep that have gone astray; and that the very best of us, if left to ourselves, might wander blindfold to perdition. And I cannot help being wae for the poor thing that used to come to me for sweeties when he was a bairn, and hold up his wee mouth to be kissed: better if he had died then, young and innocent, than live to be a disgrace to his friends and a broken and worthless outcast! But it's no right to despair, Norman. While there's life there's hope; and if I could but learn his whereabouts, I would not rest until I had delivered the prodigal to the custody of his father."

"Well, Mr Shearaway, I shall make inquiry without loss of time, and let you know the result. By the way, have you chanced to fall in with our old political candidate Mr Sholto Linklater? He seems now acclimatised to London society."

"Ay—ye have not forgotten the old election splores? Those were fearsome times, Norman; and I thank God that there is little chance of our seeing the like again, at least in the present generation! But Sholto's not just an idiot, though he has made a narrow escape. The Whigs would have stretched a point for him, as they have done for many that are not half so honest—for, though I am mixed up with that party, I'll no deny that their abuse of patronage is a crying sin and scandal; but Sholto was a terrible bad hack, and, more than that, he was an imprudent creature. I have it on sure authority that, at a dinner given by one of

the Whig grandees, Sholto, who had quietly sucked in two bottles of claret without uttering a word, suddenly enunciated his opinion 'that the Liberals were a pack of d——d scoundrels'—a sentiment, ye see, not just exactly suited to the occasion, considering that there were some half dozen of what are called 'advanced men' at the table. They tried to muzzle him, but the malt had got aboon the meal. Sholto was not to be restrained, and repeated the offensive phrase with the pertinacity of a parrot."

"As a matter of course, then, he would be set down in the black list?"

"Surely; for he had committed petty treason. But a handle to one's name is no bad thing in these speculative times. To be an honourable, or even a baronet, is worth an annuity; and Sholto has become valuable as a director of new banking companies, insurance offices, railway provisional committees, and suchlike, and pockets a guinea at the least for every meeting he attends. It's just wonderful how many ways there are in London of picking up a subsistence!"

"I am sure I wish him all manner of success, for there are many worse fellows than he. And now to inquire about poor Littlewoo."

Attie Faunce was the first person I applied to; but Attie could tell me nothing beyond the fact that Mr Speedwell had not lately been visible at his accustomed haunts.

"I think it highly probable," said he, "that he has gone down to some of the north-country races. I

happen to know that he does a good deal in the betting-ring, and even owns a horse or two, by which, through the connivance of the jocks and blacklegs with whom he is allied, he has carried off stakes of considerable value. If the young fellow in whom you are interested has money, Speedwell may be keeping him as a pigeon. If he is thoroughly cleaned out, still he may be made useful in laying the odds, as it cannot much signify if he should prove a defaulter; whereas, if he wins, the two divide the booty. I rather suspect that my old acquaintance Jack Fuller practised in that line of business."

"But how to find him out——"

"Nay, as to that I cannot advise you," said Attie. "And, to say the truth, I think it would be but a wildgoose chase. Depend upon it, Speedwell will find ways and means of keeping him out of your sight, if he has any interest in doing so; and you must judge for yourself whether, under any circumstances, it is likely that you could persuade the youth to break with the Jew, and return to the paternal roof. When fellows have gone to the mischief in so determined a manner, they are not easily reclaimed. The only effectual way to convince a fool of his folly is to let him feel the consequences."

"As a general rule, Attie, I believe you are right; but this Littlewoo is such a very weak fellow, that if my friend Mr Shearaway once got hold of him, I am convinced he would follow like a spaniel."

"And be lost again within six weeks, as sure as

there are dog-stealers in Regent Street ! There is one way, however, in which you might contrive it. Procure a writ against him for debt. I daresay his outraged landlady will accommodate you so far, and then fee an officer of the Hebrew persuasion to make the arrest—not one of the tribe but can form a shrewd notion of the locality which Mr Speedwell is honouring with his presence.”

“ Not a bad idea ! I shall certainly think it over.”

“ Do so. And now tell me—you who have the key to so many mysteries—what will be the probable effect of this astounding discovery which has thrown the City into an uproar ?”

“ What discovery, Attie ? I have heard of none.”

“ Wretched and slothful feeder of the press !” said Faunce. “ Is this the way you cater for the public appetite ? Why, man, the news is running through the streets like wildfire, striking terror into the souls of every caitiff who has committed dalliance with scrip, spreading dismay into back parlours, and, for aught I know, carrying consternation to the Cabinet. There has been no such profound sensation since the detection of the Cato Street conspiracy.”

“ It must be very recent then, for I heard nothing about it this morning.”

“ Perhaps so ; but in these rapid times the lapse of an hour is sufficient to rouse all London from White-chapel to Kensington. Know, then, that the Stock Exchange is paralysed by the discovery that large

quantities of forged railway scrip have been put into circulation."

"That news does not surprise me in the least degree, Attie; for, months ago, I advocated the propriety of making that kind of issue liable to stamp-duty, not more for the advantage of the revenue than for the safety of the public. But are the forgeries general or special?"

"So far as I can learn—for, to tell you the truth, I only heard of this within the last twenty minutes—the taint has as yet been discovered in one line only, but that involves immense liabilities. And, Sinclair, you may thank your stars that you have escaped entanglement in this matter, for the concern I allude to is that upon which Mr Beaton has been hazarding his heaviest stake."

"How do you mean, Faunce? Is it supposed that this fraud is likely to affect him seriously?"

"It is impossible to conjecture the result. People are as yet merely shrugging their shoulders—that is, those who have none of the suspected documents in their desks; but you must be prepared to hear the very strangest rumours. They *do* say that the signatures are believed to be genuine, though the engraved part of the paper is counterfeited. But that may be conjecture, or rumour, or falsehood, which is much the same. Take it at the best, this is a downright blow for Beaton, which must bring him to his knees."

"It may do so, Faunce; but, my life on it, it will leave his honour unimpeached. I have no reason to

love the man, nor do I think him immaculate in his domestic relations ; but I will not believe it possible that he could be cognisant of anything approaching to a deliberate fraud !”

“Far be it from me to contradict you, Sinclair,” replied Attie. “I have not the advantage of knowing the gentleman. But we live in queer times ; and, as Uncle Osborne remarked the other day, there is no trusting the solvency even of bankers who profess to be unusually pious, and to brood evangelically over the deposits of sanctimonious sisters. That, assuredly, is not Mr Beaton’s habit or propensity ; but he is playing for the great game—gambling, in short, to the utmost of his ability ; and a man may be ruined quite as fast on the Stock Exchange of London as if he went on staking thousands of pounds at the tables of Homburg or Wiesbaden.”

“As to the ruin,” said I, “you may be perfectly right ; but the question of honour depends upon the fairness of the play. This, however, is important news, and interests me not a little.”

I did indeed feel as if a crisis in which I was specially concerned was near at hand. Like the intrepid mariner in some unexplored strait which the plummet had never sounded, Mr Beaton had held on his course, defiant of shoal or surge, to come at length within range of the sweep of a tremendous whirlpool. Would the bark still obey the helm, or would it be driven irresistibly to perdition ? If quick foresight, rapid action, and strong nerve, could avail to prevent

shipwreck, Beaton might yet escape ; for all these qualities he was known to possess in more than common measure, and sheer audacity has oftentimes been able to conquer circumstance. That was my first impression ; but a very little reflection convinced me that it was quite delusive as applied to the peculiar case. It is quite possible that a beleaguered troop should, in the energy of despair, hew a passage for itself through the array of an opposing army ; or, to pursue the other metaphor, that a vessel might be skilfully piloted between the dangers of Scylla and Charybdis ; but it is absurd to use such illustrations when speaking of the career of a merchant or a speculator. When a man has been trading to an extent far beyond the range of his capital, he never can calculate with security upon the maintenance of his credit. The prestige of his name and former success may indeed sustain him for a time ; and so long as no suspicion is excited, and the market remains untroubled, he may continue to receive accommodation upon easy terms. But once let it be whispered that his affairs are seriously deranged, or let one of those monetary crises that so often shake the mercantile community occur, and human ingenuity can hardly devise means to avert the impending ruin. In that position I had reason to fear that Mr Beaton now was placed. His realised fortune bore no kind of proportion to the vast extent of his speculations ; and most of the latter were based upon schemes which, though they might ultimately prove remunerative, required time for their develop-

ment, and might not be profitable for years. Was it likely, then, that the parties to whom he was already indebted would grant him further accommodation? Or would they not rather, on this new alarm, insist upon immediate settlement, or fresh security, which it hardly could be in his power to offer?

Far be it from me to depreciate the splendid enterprise of our later times, or the vivacious operation of the new banking system, which, in the course of a few months, can transform a salaried clerk of a hundred per annum into a merchant of extensive dealings, who entertains company with a profusion which, a hundred years ago, would hardly have been expected from an earl, and whose sideboard glitters with plate that might have stirred the cupidity of Archibald de Hagenbach or the Wild Boar of Ardennes. But the old maxim of Bailie Jarvie, "Never to put out your arm farther than that you can easily draw it back again," has lost nothing of its pristine force and significance, and is to be regarded as at once the simplest and the safest rule of conduct. Well would it be for the interests of British commerce if the rule was more rigidly observed!

But those daring forgeries, following so closely upon the suspected operations on the stocks of the same company, did they not indicate some concerted scheme of deliberate villany? The more I considered the matter, the more thoroughly did I become convinced that Speedwell the Jew was mixed up with both transactions. The remarkable words which I had heard him utter in the Arcade, in reference apparently to a

job which had been offered to but refused by Flusher, recurred to my memory, and seemed to suggest a clue by which the mystery might be unravelled. I determined to lose no time in ascertaining the nature of the connection between Speedwell and the unlucky engraver, and with that object directed my steps towards the office in which Davie Osett was employed.

CHAPTER II.

MR EWINS IN TRIBULATION.

ON my way thither, whilst threading the Strand, I observed, immediately before me, one of those strange figures which are seldom to be seen in the streets of London, unless when some extraordinary gathering at Exeter Hall, for the abolition of tithes or the revision of the Liturgy, allures from remote parts of the country those splinters of the scattered remnant who still adhere to the traditions of Hugh Peters and the redoubtable Barebones. So preposterous was his array, that I could not help thinking of the description which Ewins had given me of his smart friend, Mr Haman S. Walker, when he appeared in the character of the Reverend Issachar Quail. 'There were the broad-brimmed hat, beaver mits, and broken umbrella ; and the shambling gait of my immediate precursor on the pavement materially enhanced the resemblance. In his hand he carried a heavy carpet-bag ; and the folds of a thick muffler rising over the collar of his coat suggested the notion that the reverend gentleman was either suffering

from an attack of bronchitis or nervously apprehensive of the same. I crossed over to the other side of the street, in order to obtain, without being observed, a glimpse of the facial lineaments of this remarkable personage ; and, having done so, I formed the resolution of following the interesting pilgrim until he should come to some halt, or seek a convenient place of shelter.

His mind was obviously set above vanities, for he deigned to cast no look either at printseller's window or at silversmith's glittering gear ; but his head did vibrate a little as he passed the door of a refreshment-house, from which issued gusty steams, proclaiming the hour of early dinner ; and as he came opposite the "Cock," there was a hesitation in his step, as though he had been sorely tempted by the inner man to order a beefsteak in that well-known establishment, to be followed, doubtless, by the pint of port, furnished by the plump head-waiter whom Alfred Tennyson has canonised in immortal verse. But possibly it occurred to the mind of the rigid Puritan that a house patronised by a poet must necessarily be frequented by swash-bucklers, and other rake-helly characters ; so, passing a little further on, he dived into a passage, which I instantly penetrated ; and I found him snugly ensconced—where does the reader think ?—in a box of the coffee-room of orthodox Samuel Johnson's old tavern haunt, the Mitre !

Very few people frequented the Mitre then, for fashion changes absurdly. I do not know whether the establishment is still continued ; but fifteen years ago it

was a good house, in a quiet way, for a man who wanted a dinner which he could discuss without being molested by the gabbling of noisy clerks and small literary men, which is a decided impediment to the process of deliberate digestion. I always liked to have a steak at the Mitre. It was sure to be solid and good, and, withal, well flavoured, as are the doctrines of the Church of England ; and the odour of tripe, which Dissenters most affect, never tainted its venerable walls. I had run my fox to his earth ; and, having done so, I dispensed with all delicacy of introduction.

“ Good day, Mr Ewins ! ” said I ; “ I am glad to perceive that you are about to take an early dinner. I saw you going along the Strand, and, not having any late engagement to-day, I felt inclined for a comfortable chat. If you have no objection, I shall desire the waiter to double the portion you have ordered.”

I entertain no manner of doubt that Ewins would strenuously have denied his real character to one less acquainted with his physiognomy than I was ; however, he was quite candid with me, merely muttering in a husky sort of tone—

“ Wall, it’s a rum go ! ”

“ I do not exactly comprehend your meaning, Mr Ewins.”

“ O, darn your ’cuteness, squire ! You know well enough what I mean. But you’ve traced me cleverly, that’s a fact ; and I guess I may as well drop shams and come down at once, as the ’coon said to General Scott.”

“Why, Mr Ewins, it was not very easy to recognise you in so singular a masquerading habit. But, my good sir, it strikes me that you have erred a little on the side of extravagance. Had you restrained your genius from running into caricature, and selected your garb more in accordance with the ordinary habits of society, you might have preserved your incognito, which, I must presume, from this masquerading experiment, is at present to you a matter of some importance.”

“That’s it !” said Ewins, despondingly—“my notions are always too splendiferous by half. If you asked me to come out as an alligator, I’d be sure to show like a snapping-turtle. But I’m glad, Squire Sinclair, that you were the first man to strike my trail, for I do confidently reckon you won’t split ; and, to tell you the truth, I feel rather slimy so long as I am in this here location.”

“Meaning London, I presume ? Admitting that to be the case, of which you are indisputably the best judge, may I be pardoned for suggesting that you have also taken no inconsiderable pains to afford an excellent trace to a detective officer.”

So saying, I pointed to his travelling-bag, the label of which bore the name of “Rev. Caleb Legge, Passenger, Liverpool,” in conspicuous characters.

“Darn me if I thought of that !” said Ewins. “I don’t know what’s come over me, but I han’t the gump-tion of a buffalo-calf. I say now, squire—you’ll be close as wax, won’t you ?”

“That must depend, Mr Ewins, in a great measure upon yourself,” I said ; for I now felt morally sure that the Yankee was cognisant of all that had taken place, and could, if he chose, give me such information as would lead to the detection of Speedwell. “It is but right I should tell you that I am deeply interested in the affair in question——”

“Whew!—Then the prairie’s on fire,” said Mr Ewins, “and I’m trapped as neatly as a beaver !”

“Nay, Mr Ewins, you go too fast. Possibly matters may not be quite as bad as you imagine ; though the result must, in a great measure, depend upon your own conduct. But we are too public here, and liable to interruption. Let us adjourn to a private room, where we may confer together without risk of observation ; and I think it will be your own fault if we do not agree upon some compromise which may screen you from ultimate danger.”

The Yankee eagerly assented ; and in a few minutes our banquet was served to us in privacy. I had heard some curious stories of the amazing rapidity with which our Transatlantic brethren are accustomed to bolt their victuals, but I was not prepared for the wolfish ravenousness of Ewins, who pegged into the steaks with a voracity which I would have set down as miraculous, but for his confession, that he had been in hiding for four-and-twenty hours in a locality where boiled whelks, and such other trifling and stimulant nutritives, were more in request than the flesh of muttons or of beeves. Great was my joy in discovering that

Ewins considered himself to be so seriously compromised.

When the poor remnants of the esculents were removed, I suggested negus as the proper libation to the *genius loci*; and, our wants being supplied, Ewins, to whom food seemed to have supplied courage, lighted his cigar, crossed his legs, favoured me with a snaky glance, and then resumed—

“Wall, squire, what’s the next of it?”

“I fear, Mr Ewins, you must be content in the mean time to forego your intention of bidding farewell to the hospitable shores of England. I say so with reference to your own welfare, for you cannot be blind to the serious consequences which would ensue were you to be apprehended in the act of flight.”

“I don’t know that,” replied Ewins; “it ain’t no sin for a chap to give leg-bail if he can’t come down with the dollars.”

“Yes; but this is not a case of simple debt. The law, my friend, has rather sharp claws for the seizure and punishment of delinquents of another kind. But let us come to the point at once. You were, I presume, cognisant of the way in which certain information was obtained from the office of the Board of Trade?”

“What’s the good speaking of that?” said Ewins; “that affair ‘is hushed up—dead and buried long ago. I guess, mister, if that’s all your business with me, you’ll find that you’ve been wakening up the wrong passenger.”

“Don’t be in such a violent hurry, Mr Ewins! We

shall presently reach the matter in which you are more immediately interested ; and I pray you to observe that, while you can do yourself no possible harm by telling me what you know of that transaction, your silence or obstinacy may compel me, however reluctantly, to adopt another course. Having given you that friendly hint, I now ask you plainly whether Speedwell did not derive his information from a young man engaged in the public service ? ”

“ Wall, squire, I don’t mind telling you that I guessed as much ; but I took care to keep my own neck out of that halter, for I never set eyes on the young loafer whom Speedwell put up to the dodge.”

“ But you went into the speculation afterwards ? ”

“ I allow I did. I wasn’t to be hindered doing a good streak of business because I had rather a clear notion of the way the cards would turn up.”

“ We need not enter into the moral argument, Mr Ewins,” said I ; “ the admission you have made is quite sufficient for my purpose. And now, as to the forgeries——”

Mr Ewins sprang to his feet.

“ Rope’s the word ! ” cried he. “ I know’d the murder would out. It’s all up with Jefferson J. Ewins ! Lynching ain’t nice ; but it’s a merciful end compared to being tucked up of a cold morning in front of Newgate Jail for Britishers to snigger at ! and I all the while as innocent as an oyster ! O, Squire Sinclair, don’t you think it possible that I might somehow manage to absquatulate ? ”

“I fear not, Mr Ewins,” I replied. “If I, who certainly was not looking for, nor even thinking of you, could at once see through your disguise, what chance is there of your escaping the vigilance of officers who are regularly trained as detectives? Why, man, you would be apprehended at the railway terminus! But calm yourself, and sit down. You say that you are innocent; and I have every disposition to believe that you are so. I do not think you are a man who would wilfully commit a crime; but that you are very seriously compromised is unfortunately but too certain. It is therefore your interest as well as your duty to endeavour to clear yourself, by stating without reservation what you know of this nefarious business.”

“I’ll do it, squire!” replied Ewins. “I’ve a kinder notion you mean well by me; anyhow, I can’t be in a straiter jam than this. Besides, I know right well that devil’s bastard the Jew would swear me to the gallows if he got a chance of peaching first!”

“On that,” said I, anxious to encourage the tendency of my estimable acquaintance towards confession, “you may reckon with perfect certainty. Speedwell will never stretch hemp if perjury can provide him with a substitute.”

“Don’t speak in that way, squire!” said the Yankee, with a spasmodic twitch of the mouth. “That’s a kind of cravat I have no fancy to try on, if I can help it. So I’ll even make a clean breast of it. You see the way was this. Speedwell and I had been doing a deal of business on joint hook in the shares of that

particular consarn ; and it so happened that when we got the information that was to send the line down, we were 'clean out of scrip. Of course our game was to sell before the secret oozed out, and that we did pretty largely ; but when settling-day came we had no stock to deliver, and prices were a good stretch higher than before. Fact is, we had poked the fire rather too early. I was for paying the difference, trusting to make all right by the next move ; but Speedwell wouldn't hear of that—you might as well try to get honeycomb out of the mouth of a bear as extract a hard dollar from such a button-up'd file ! He told me that he knew a chap who had lots of that paper on hand, and would lend it to us as a favour, if I would give my receipt ; 'for,' said Speedwell, 'it's a rule among our people not to deal, by way of bargain, in such things with those of their own family and persuasion ; and the cove who can give us the accommodation happens to be my uncle and a Rabbi. I'll make all square with him if you'll grant the acknowledgment. We'll touch the money in the mean time ; and next week, when the stock's at the lowest figure, we can buy in, and hand over the paper to Lazarus.' ”

“Then, Mr Ewins,” said I, “if I comprehend you rightly, Mr Speedwell's proposal involved something resembling a fraud upon his uncle, if indeed such a relative existed ? ”

“I guess it might,” replied Ewins ; “but, you see, I wasn't bound to cough, if he thought he could get within reach of the old billy-goat on the blind side. I

allow, though, I was a tarnation fool—I ought to have known better than to walk into such a trap. But I thought the dodge a right good one, and sure to succeed. I signed my name to a paper acknowledging the receipt of a huge lot of shares, with which we effected the settlement.”

“ Well, and what of that ? ”

“ Don’t you conceit it ? Darn’d if every bit of that paper weren’t a forgery ! I took a note of the numbers at the time, it being my habit to chalk such things down—though, I recollect now, Speedwell pretended to be in a tearing hurry—and I learned yesterday morning, from a sure source, that the whole concern is forged ! Weren’t that a stunning fix ? I sent to inquire about Speedwell. He had pulled up stakes, and made clearings, I can’t tell where, carrying with him, too, every cent of the money that was paid for the shares ! I saw clear enough that I would be nailed in the first instance as the utterer, so I notioned that it would be best for my constitution to waddle out of it as fast as might be, and take the benefit of sea air. That’s the whole story, Squire Sinclair ; and it’s true, every word of it, or may I be clawed to death by wild cats ! ”

Notwithstanding the extreme elasticity of his moral notions, I felt rather sorry for Ewins. This revelation, of which I did not doubt the sincerity, showed me that his speculative and inventive genius had succumbed to that of the Jew, not because his sagacity was less, but because he paused upon mere roguery, whereas the

Israelite launched boldly, and yet astutely, into crime. It is astonishing how many men there are, moving even in good society, who will cheat, though they dare not steal. Theft and swindling seem to have changed places in the scale of moral delinquency. The fine old ethical sense of the middle ages, when weighing the one offence against the other, was in favour of the bold marauder. Robin Hood makes free with the saddlebags of the abbot, and is not thereby lowered in our estimation. Little John bestows upon the spendthrift nephew the purse which he has just extorted from the miserly old uncle, and the deed has a flavour of benevolence. Nowadays, though actual crime is justly and vigorously punished, chicanery does not enter into the black catalogue, and a man may dirty his fingers more than once before he is repudiated by society.

Ewins was beyond all doubt a most voracious leech ; and had he been swindled by his more daring confederate out of the whole of his unrighteous gains—yea, fleeced hide and wool—I should not have felt the smallest regret. But this was a different matter. No doubt he had been playing falsely, and therefore was answerable for the consequences ; but he, too, had been imposed on by the bolder villain, and been made an unwitting accessory to a deed for which he was answerable to the law. Appearances were greatly against him. The fact of the forgery once established, it would be easy, through the brokers, who were deeply interested in forwarding the inquiry, to discover the party who had delivered the scrip ; and so Ewins would

stand committed. Speedwell, it was to be presumed, had taken care that there should be no evidence of any further transaction ; and the Rabbi Lazarus being obviously a myth, no means of establishing his innocence seemed available to the unfortunate Yankee.

“ Have you any suspicion, Mr Ewins, from whom that scrip was actually obtained ? Speedwell could hardly have managed this without assistance.”

“ I swear I know nothing more about it than the babe unborn !” replied Ewins.

“ Then I must needs say that, as matters stand, you are in an extremely ugly predicament.”

“ I guess, squire, that’s my own notion too ; but can’t you contrive somehow to help me out of it ? It’s the reverse of pleasant, I can tell you, to be fixed like a wolf in a trap, looking out for the squatter, who, he knows, will knock him on the head.”

“ At present, Mr Ewins, I can suggest nothing ; but you have acted very wisely in confiding your story to me. I have special reasons of my own for desiring that the villany of this man Speedwell should be thoroughly exposed and punished ; and you may rely upon it that I shall spare no effort to accomplish that. If we can bring the guilt home to him, you may escape ; otherwise you stand in some risk, not perhaps of suffering by the hands of Jack Ketch, but of increasing your experiences by a voyage to a penal colony. My advice to you is to remain here for the present, and to keep yourself quite private. If you show yourself in the streets, you may rely upon it that

you will be instantly arrested ; Speedwell will take the alarm, and go into concealment, for which, doubtless, he has many facilities ; and your last chance of safety will be thrown away."

"Say no more, squire !" said Ewins. "I'll keep as quiet as a runaway nigger in a sugar-barrel. But you won't desert me, squire, at such a push as this ?"

"Be assured that I will not, Mr Ewins. I must now leave you for the purpose of making some further inquiries, but I shall return in the evening, when I hope I may be able to give you some comforting intelligence."

"Comfort !" said the Yankee. "I guess I shan't feel comfortable again till I suck a gin-sling in Hartford. But it's all my own fault. I've allowed myself to get off the rails ; and I begin to think that the Methody parson was right after all when he said, 'Vice is a skunk that smells awfully rank when stirred up by the pole of misfortune !' "

CHAPTER III.

A DISCLOSURE.

THIS was destined to be a busy day for me. Not encountering Davie Osett, I repaired to my own rooms, where I found him awaiting my return in a state of considerable excitement.

“Lord save us a’, Mr Norman !” he cried, “hae ye heard the wonderful news that has set London in a bleeze ?”

“This story of the railway forgeries, I suppose you mean, Davie ?”

“Ay, just that ! I didna gie the folk here the credit of thinking they should be so easily steered ; but if a new gunpowder plot had been fand out, they couldna mak’ mair o’t. I have been down to the City ; and I never saw onything to compare til’t but a half-harried wasp’s byke : sic fleeing, and buzzing, and storming, and stinging as is ganging on yonder ! They are a’ crying out that they are robbed, and every man suspects his neighbour.”

“Then the real criminal has not yet been discovered ?”

“I’m thinking no. But a committee of investigation, as they ca’t, is sitting, and some of the City magistrates have taken the job in hand. But ye’ll no hinder people from saying that your friend Mr Beaton kens mair than he should do about the transaction, and I heard them say that he was one of the first folk to be examined.”

“I should be astonished,” I replied, “that any man in his senses could entertain so preposterous an idea for a single moment, were I not aware of the fact, that in times of panic people will credit almost anything! Setting aside his undoubted high character, is it possible to conceive that a man in Mr Beaton’s high position would lend himself to a fraud which was certain to be immediately detected?”

“That’s just what I said mysel’; but the chield I spoke wi’—he was a dour auld deevil o’ a broker—gied a kind o’ grunt, and speered if I had never heard tell of one Aislabie, a Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was drummed out of the House of Commons for some pliskie o’ the same kind as this. And sooth to say, Mr Norman, if one-half o’ what I hae heard be true, Mr Beaton will be sair put to it to gar folks believe that he has keep’d his fingers clean.”

“Why, what have you heard, Davie, beyond mere vague and general suspicion?”

“I’ll tell you that in a jiffy. First and foremost, they say that the local secretary, whose name was to the scrip along with those of two directors, of whom Beaton was one, has fled the country. He left London

mair than a week ago, and has never since been heard of; and his liabilities are weel kenn'd to be enormous. Now it is not to be supposed that he has gane off altogether toom-handed; and, my certie, if he has gotten in his pouch onything like one-third of the money that was paid for the falsified scrip, he may cock his beaver in New York, and keep the crown o' the causeway!"

This piece of intelligence perfectly astounded me. If it were true that the secretary had really fled—and such disappearances were in those days very far from uncommon—the weight of suspicion would certainly be removed from Ewins, and a totally different construction might be placed on Speedwell's share in the transaction. It was in the highest degree improbable that the Yankee could have made any mistake as to the character of the scrip which he had been induced to borrow and put into circulation. He was much too sharp for that. Besides, he had taken the precaution to note down the numbers of the shares, which tallied precisely with those on the falsified paper. The missing secretary and Speedwell might possibly have been in league; and, from fear of detection, have fled together, or at least simultaneously. Such were the thoughts that rapidly crossed my mind; but I was anxious to hear more, and Davie proceeded.

"The next thing, Mr Norman, that looks unco queer is this—that for some thousands of shares, representing I wotna what amount of money, there are duplicates in circulation; and the best engravers

in London are ready to swear that the signatures are precisely identical. If that be sae—and I heard it on gude authority—there will be braw wark for the lawyers. Scrip's just like bank-notes ; if twa of them bear the same number, it stands to reason that they canna baith represent the same amount of money ; and if neither set are forgeries—that is, as regards the signatures—Beaton, and the other director that signed, are clearly liable. Doubtless they may have recourse against the company, but I take that to be a desperate chance.”

“ What you tell me now, Davie, establishes a strong presumption that Mr Beaton, far from perpetrating a fraud, has been made the victim of a deliberate conspiracy. He may, indeed, unintentionally have signed a fraudulent issue, for which he may legally be liable ; but that cannot in the slightest degree affect his character.”

Davie shook his head.

“ Mr Norman,” he said, “ if you happened to have scrip in your pocket-book, for which you had paid—we shall say five thousand pound—and were told that it was as worthless for the purposes of negotiation as the notes of the Ayrshire Bank, it's my belief that you would not be just quite so charitable in opinion. And you'll pardon me for saying that your ain een might have been pyked out ; for had you consented to take scrip instead of hard cash on a day that you may weel remember, I'se warrant you'd have been as mad against Beaton as the lave.”

“ Possibly, Davie, you are right ; but, not being in that predicament, I am the more likely to give an impartial judgment.”

“ But, after all,” said Davie, “ what matters character in a case like this ? Character’s a grand thing for a puir chap like me, or for any lad that has to make his way in the world. It’s our certificate, and what we must needs carry with us if we hope to hop up from ae branch to the ither of the social tree. But when a man gets to the tap he commonly does just what he likes best, without caring for the clash of those below him. However, the matter as it stands is a perfect puzzle. Ae thing is clear enough, and that is, that there has been foul play somewhere. The secretary chield will hae the wyte on’t, for it’s like by this time he’s out of reach of fugie warrants ; and Beaton, whether he can clear himself or no, maun abide the consequences. The banks will be down upon him now ; and the wealth that he thought sae muckle o’—house, gear, plenishing, and a’—will be swept away like the jingling river-ice when Tweed comes down after a thaw ! ”

“ Unhappy man ! he is indeed greatly to be pitied.”

“ Deil a bit o’ me pities him ! ” said Davie. “ Better folks than he have felt the black ox tread on their foot, and the world has made sma’ maen for them.”

“ Fie, Osett ! ” said I—“ that is not spoken like a Christian. All of us have our faults ; and though pride is a very detestable one, it is not for us to rejoice when God sees fit to rebuke it. Mr Beaton may have

been arrogant, but I never heard it said that he was unjust ; and if, in his attempt to climb high above his fellows, he has been so terribly stricken down, rather let us take warning from his fate than exult over his misfortune."

" I'm sure I bear nae ill-will to the man," said Davie. " He never did scathe to me or mine ; but for a' ye say, Mr Norman, ye'll no prevent me from thinking that he is gey like a blawn-up bladder, and that, ye ken, if it is fit for naething else, sorts grandly for a foot-ba'. But I should ask your pardon, for I hae observed, mair nor ance, that ye hae a kind o' hankering for thae Beatons, the cause of which I canna comprehend, for I trow ye hae little to thank him for."

" Never you mind, Davie, what I think or feel. I own, however, that I have strong reasons for wishing that no suspicion may rest upon Mr Beaton's probity, whatever may become of his fortune ; and therefore I am anxious that this strange business should be thoroughly investigated. What you have told me regarding the double issue of shares is certainly perplexing, and rather contradicts some suspicions that were forming in my mind, for I have already received a curious communication on the subject. However, I must not neglect any possible chance of obtaining more accurate information. The first person I wish to see is Flusher, for whom you were kind enough to find employment."

" I can bring him to you in five minutes," said Davie. " Troth, Mr Norman, the obligation is on my

side, for he is a handy creature and a willing, and never deserts his work for a spree."

"Then pray fetch him," said I. "And now, Davie, old companion, I must take you into my confidence, for I may need a friend on whom I can rely to help me, it may be with hand as well as head——"

"Not a word mair, Mr Norman! I'm the man that will stick to ye like a brither; and though I am maybe no so learned as some o' thae parliamentary chields, 'od I whiles think that I hae as gude a grip o' common sense as the best o' them! If it comes to the use of hands, I fear no living man, if ye dinna bring sair odds against me, as ye did down-by at Wilbury."

"Thank you, foster-brother! And now let us ascertain whether Flusher can throw any light on the business on hand: afterwards I shall explain to you everything."

"So, then," soliloquised I, when Osett had departed on his mission, "all is over with the proud merchant! The men who fawned upon him yesterday, because they hoped to profit by his favours, will turn against him to-morrow, and swell with their voices the general chorus of obloquy. The summer friends will fall from him; those who have shared his feasts will be the first to denounce his extravagance; the politicians who pointed to him as a model of upright enterprise will denounce him as an impostor; the hypocrites who craved his advice will now revile him as a fool! Well, well—it is the way of the world, that recognises no

standard of excellence save success, and regards failure as a crime ! But Mary—here at least her persecution ends, for after this event she need not fear the renewal of the addresses of Lord Pentland. Strange, that the adversity of the man through whom I have been made independent should afford me the only reasonable prospect of attaining to the highest happiness I desire ! Stranger still, that the antagonism which our only interview provoked should have forwarded the hope which at one time appeared to be entirely visionary ! But, if I have estimated Mary Beaton's character aright, she will not stoop to accept, as a refuge from poverty, any offer that might be dictated by the mere selfishness of love. I shall strive to win her by vindicating her father's honour ; and, that once established, why, let the world say its worst. No sage has yet been able to find a talisman against misfortune ; and the only wise men of the earth are those who have borne it with equanimity. This man cannot so bear it. He will chafe like the caged tiger, until his furious rage is that of self-destruction ; for he falls from such a height that the brain must necessarily reel, and something like madness intervene. Heaven help him ! but let me strive to do my duty in that course which is dictated by honour and by love."

Davie Osett presently appeared, with Flusher in his train.

"Mr Flusher," I said, "it may be in your power to render me an essential service. You once informed me that professional work had been offered to you, but

that you declined undertaking it because it was of an illegal or criminal nature. Was not that so ?”

“It was, sir—just as you say.”

“Moreover, I remember that Mr Speedwell, when you and he were conversing together in the Arcade, taunted you with squeamishness for refusing employment. Will you favour me by explaining the circumstance to which he then alluded—that is, if you are not bound by any solemn promise to secrecy ?”

“I have given no such promise, sir, and I shall frankly tell you everything. When I arrived here from Manchester, I was, as I think I told you before, in a very destitute condition—anxious to procure work, but unable to find any. I had applied in vain to several engravers, and was returning home one evening almost broken-hearted, when I chanced to observe, in the window of an obscure shop in a street leading from Seven Dials, a ticket bearing the words, ‘Engraving done here.’ I knew the locality to be one of indifferent reputation: the greater part of the shops were receptacles for old clothes or broken metal; and the men who lounged about the doors were evidently of that class which is especially liable to the scrutiny of the police.

“Determined not to throw away even the smallest chance of obtaining employment, and yet anything but sanguine as to the result, I opened a door which gave motion to a bell fastened to a spring. It led to a small dingy room, without any counter, but tapestried with cast-off apparel suspended on hooks and cords; and

near the fire two men were seated, apparently in close conversation. One of them, immediately on my entrance, turned his back, so that I could not get a glimpse of his features, while the other, a big strong man of repulsive appearance, who was apparently the master of the premises, demanded in a surly tone what I wanted.

“ I replied by referring to the ticket in the window, and explained that I was an operative engraver, on the look-out for a job, and willing to undertake any for less than the usual wage.

“ ‘Then you may go about your business,’ said the man. ‘Bundle yourself off in less than no time; you’re not wanted here. I take it you’re none of our set, and we never trust jobs to any but our pals.’

“ At this his comrade plucked him by the coat, and muttered something which I could not hear.

“ ‘No, no!’ said the other. ‘It’s no good trusting to a cove unless you are sure sartain that he does not peach. For anything we know, this may be a trap; and I won’t go out of the regular line of business to please you or any man!’

“ ‘Confound you for an obstinate ass!’ was the reply. ‘You told me that you can think of no one fit to do the trick, and now, when an opportunity turns up——’ here he lowered his voice again, and the rest of the conversation was conducted in whispers.

“ At length the master of the house apparently yielded the point, and sat down with a growl of disapprobation; while the other, still concealing his face,

though he made a movement which enabled him to see mine, asked me several questions as to my circumstances, previous history, and professional experience—the answers to which seemed to satisfy him. He then took out a pocket-book, and, handing to me, over his shoulder, one or two slips of engraved paper, which purported to be railway obligations, inquired whether I could execute such work as that?

“ ‘Most certainly,’ I said; ‘there is nothing in that requiring extraordinary skill.’

“ ‘But can you execute a plate, the impressions from which shall be precisely similar to, and undistinguishable from, a copy placed in your hands?’

“ ‘That is not quite so easy; but it can be done, and I have no objection to make the attempt.’

“ ‘I’ll tell you what it is, master,’ interrupted the man of the house. ‘It’s clear you are going to take your own way as to this, and it’s no business of mine to prevent you. But if you will take up with a tramp who has never been on the regular lay, settle with him somewhere else than in my crib. I keep house for none but true boys; so, if you want to cut any more whids you must go and patter elsewhere.’

“ ‘Well, there’s sense in that,’ said the other, ‘though you need not be quite so grumpy. Hark ye, friend! Meet me to-morrow night at ten o’clock precisely, at the place I have noted on this card. Inquire for Mr Tibbetts, and the waiter will show you to a room. There we can confer further. Meantime, keep your tongue from wagging, and take this as an earnest.’

“ So saying, he threw me a crown-piece ; and the landlord, growling like a mastiff, half jostled me into the street. On the following night I went punctually to the place indicated—a small public-house in an alley off Holborn. I was ushered into an apartment, where I found the stranger with whom I had already communicated, and a flash-looking man, who was no other than Speedwell.”

“ I knew we should get on the trace at last ! ” cried I, interrupting Flusher’s narrative. “ Notwithstanding all his turnings and windings, the rascal could not escape. But the other person, Mr Flusher—what sort of a man was he ? ”

“ His real name,” replied Flusher, “ I have not discovered, nor did I ever see him again after that interview. But he was a middle-aged man, rather stout in figure, bald on the forehead, and with sand-coloured hair.”

“ And big red whiskers ? ” asked Davie Osett.

“ Yes, they certainly were. And, now that I think of it, he bore a peculiar mark, for I observed that he wanted a finger of the right hand ! ”

“ Huzzay ! The murder’s out now — I ken him brawly ! ” shouted Davie. “ That was nae ither than the missing secretary ! He’s a Durham chield that, and his name’s Dobigging. His wee finger was chackit off by a machine.”

“ This is indeed an important discovery,” I said. “ Well, Mr Flusher, what took place afterwards ? ”

“ Why, sir, after a good deal of circumlocution—for

they did not seem very willing to come to the point, and I had to answer many questions about my circumstances and position—they had a private colloquy of some length, which ended by Speedwell making a gesture of acquiescence. After doing so, he left the room immediately, without addressing a word to me ; and the other produced the document of which he wished me to make a fac-simile. It was, to the best of my remembrance, a form of scrip certificate for an issue of new shares in the Pocklington Railway.”

“ The very line I imagined ! Pray go on, Mr Flusher.”

“ I was to have the plate ready within two days, for executing which I was to receive two pounds instantly, with seven more on delivery ; which, you must understand, was a rate of payment far above the value of the work required.

“ ‘ But,’ said he, ‘ my fine fellow, there are two conditions with which you must comply. In the first place, after you have provided yourself with a plate and tools, and what other things you require, you must go to a certain place which I shall name to you, and there remain, under lock and key, until the work is done. This copy goes with me in the mean time. In the second place, you must take an oath, which I shall now administer, never, under any circumstances, to mention this transaction to a human being.’

“ ‘ That, sir,’ said I, stoutly, ‘ I will not do ; neither will I submit to be incarcerated even for a single hour. If the work is of a fair and honest kind, no such pre-

cautions are requisite—if otherwise, I am not the man for your turn.’

“ ‘Why, you fool,’ said the other, reddening, ‘do you think I want to kidnap you! Don’t you know that operative tailors—flints or dungs, as they are called—are always required, when they get a job, to finish it on their employers’ premises? I know nothing about you beyond what you yourself have told me, which may be a parcel of confounded lies; and what security have I, if you are left to yourself, that you will perform the work within the allotted time? Do you think I will run the risk of your getting drunk and disappointing me? I am willing to give you two sovereigns just now, because you really seem to be a poor devil, and I want you to provide yourself with proper tools; but the work must be done under my superintendence, or not at all.’

“ ‘Well, sir,’ said I, ‘there is reason in what you say, and in that respect I am ready to conform to your will. But as for taking an oath of secrecy, you will never persuade me to that.’

“ ‘My good fellow!’ said he, somewhat more confidently, I suppose because I had yielded a point; ‘how can you ever expect to get on in the world if you persist in such ridiculous scruples? Don’t you know that the whole Privy Council are sworn to secrecy; and do you think yourself better than the first statesmen of the land? I could satisfy you at once if I chose to do so; but really, when I engage to pay you three times

the value of the work, I must maintain that you have no right to ask explanations. I might tell you, which is not far from the truth, that the plate from which this impression was taken has been mislaid or lost, and that the person for whom I act must have it replaced within two days, otherwise he will be liable in severe penalties. But I am not entitled to disclose secrets ; and, in availing myself of your skill, I must take care to have you equally bound.'

" ' That, sir,' I replied, ' does not satisfy me. If there are secrets which you are bound to keep, I will not be mixed up with the matter. I am miserably poor, as you may see, but I have always contrived to keep a clean conscience ; and there is that in your proposal that forces me to decline the job.'

" ' Are you mad, idiot ?' said the man, starting up—
' do you know where you are ?'

" ' Perfectly well,' said I ; ' and my wife knows also. I did not trust myself in such a neighbourhood as this without taking due precautions.'

" The man bit his nether lip savagely.

" ' Well, well !' said he, ' since you are such an impracticable ass, the sooner I have done with you the better. Yet stay—I owe you a day's wage ; so there are the two sovereigns—I'll make them three. Go about your business ; and hark ye—take a quartern or so of gin, and get as drunk as your heart can desire. That's the best regimen for a fellow who is troubled with such qualms. But—mark me—if you ever breathe

a word of this, you would be safer to stand in the centre of a tunnel, with trains roaring down from opposite directions ! ” ”

“ And so, Mr Flusher,” said I, “ your interview with this mysterious personage terminated ? ”

“ It did, sir ; and I have never seen him since, as I think I have already told you.”

“ And are you ready, if called upon, to say so much before a magistrate ? ”

“ Certainly, Mr Sinclair,” replied Flusher, “ for I undertook no obligation to the contrary.”

“ Then we may dismiss the subject for the present. But, Mr Flusher, I am bound to say that your conduct on that occasion was greatly to your honour.”

“ Ah ! but,” said Flusher, slightly hanging his head, “ I took the three sovereigns ! ”

“ And you did right,” said I, “ for they certainly were fairly earned.”

“ And, mair than that, it’s aye lawful to make spoil of the Egyptians,” added Osett.

Flusher having departed, it was necessary for me, in fulfilment of my promise, to make rather a full explanation to my foster-brother, part of which was easily enough done ; but I own to feeling a little embarrassed when I was forced to refer to my attachment to Miss Beaton. Davie, however, like most other people, was delighted at being made the depository of a love secret.

“ Weel,” said he, “ that dings a’ ! Haith, Mr Norman, it was bauld in ye to stand up sàe stifly against the auld man, when ye had a fancy for his daughter. But

it's a great mercy that ye did it, otherwise ye might hae whistled for your gear. She'll be but a tocherless bride, though ; but what o' that? Ye hae gotten enough for baith, and a canty hearth is a hantle better than a rich ane."

"True, Davie ; but remember that I am by no means confident of success. Mr Beaton will probably show himself quite as implacable in misfortune as in prosperity ; and—and—in short—a thousand things may occur to render our union impossible."

"Fiddlesticks !" quoth Davie. "If you like her, and she likes you—about which, by this time, ye hae doubtless some inkling—it will a' come right in the long-run."

"Heaven grant it may !" I said. "You now understand why I feel so much interest in having this mysterious affair thoroughly cleared up ; and it seems to me, after what Flusher has told us, there can be no doubt that the forgery was committed by those two men, Dobigging and Speedwell. Yet, if the signatures are genuine, there is something still to be explained."

"I hae a kind of notion that the way they would set about it was this. It's a rule among the companies that an engraver, when he gets an order, shall supply neither more nor less than the specified number, and these are carefully counted over by a committee of directors before they pass into the hands o' the secretary, whose business it is to see them signed. It's a wise precaution, but I doubt it never entered into the heads of ony of them to count the scrip a second time,

after it had been signed. Now, what's to hinder a rogue o' a secretary, if he has blank shares or counterfeits in his pouch, to slip them in among the rest? Signing's a fashious job, and directors are ower glad to get through wi' it to pay ony attention to the numbering. No respectable tradesman would exceed his order; but there's naething you canna get done for you in London—the mair's the pity!—if you are ready to pay for it. You see Dobigging was down among the thieves, looking out for a hand, when Flusher fell in wi' him; and doubtless he would hae nae great difficulty in finding another person to engrave a plate."

"That's a shrewd conjecture, and one that seems entirely to solve the difficulty. I am glad, though, that there is no trace of Littlewoo having been implicated in this matter."

"Na," said Davie—"they wadna trust sic a kittle business to the like of him. His paws are fit for naething but howking het chestnuts frae the fire. But I canna help laughing to think that the lang shauchling Yankee has been sae cleverly let in. 'Od, that Speedwell maun be a sharp fellow!"

"He is certainly as deep a scoundrel as ever rubbed shoulders with the gallows! I wonder whether he has left the country?"

"You may be certain he has done naething of the kind," replied Davie. "What for should he? The secretary—that's Dobigging—behoved to take to his heels; for he was a ruined man otherwise, and it's to be supposed that nane knew that Speedwell had been

trafficking wi' him. Then, ye see, Speedwell contrived to make the Yankee utter the scrip, after getting from him a written acknowledgment; and I daresay he thinks that baith Ewins and Dobigging are at this moment cheek-by-jowl in a New York steamer. Then we hae heard that Speedwell didna say a word to Flusher about the engraving of the plate. It's my belief that, if it came to a trial, there wadna be evidence to convict him; for ye may be sure that the man who made the plate—unless, indeed, he was an entered member of a London gang—was soon disposed of."

"Disposed of, Osett? why, what would you insinuate?"

"Just murder, Mr Norman! D'ye trow that puir thing Flusher wad ever again have seen the blessed light o' day if he had consented to gang into ane of these fearsome holes that are weel kent to exist in London? D'ye think they'd hae let him out wi' the power to blab sic a secret as that? Na, na! when his work was done, they'd hae knocked him on the head like a beast in the shambles, and the corp wad hae been flung down a trap-door into a sewer. Ay, ye may well look astonished; but no living man kens a tithe o' the villany that gangs on heré."

"You make me shudder, Davie! Surely it is impossible that such atrocities can be committed in London."

"What for no in London, ony mair than in Paris, where they tell me that ilka morning you may see the bodies of five or six murdered men that have been

flung into the river laid out in a place they ca' the Morgue? Take a turn down-by in St Giles's, and see what sort o' looking lads you will meet wi' there. Our cairds and gypsies are whiles bad enough; but, my certie, they are angels o' light compared wi' the villains that are here!"

"Well—we must break off the discussion for the present. My first business will be to see Mr Ewins, whose mind I may somewhat relieve, provided he gives me assurance that he will make judicial disclosures. As for you, Davie, keep yourself in readiness to move, if your engagements will admit of your doing so. Otherwise——"

"Deil a fears o' my being out of the way," said Davie. "I've got three chaps under me now, and I can afford to take things easy. But to redd out a ravelled matter like this, in which you, Mr Norman, are concerned, I'd gang the length o' Tartary. Gude-night, sir; and, I say, dinna forget to give me due notice o' the wedding. It's lucky, ye ken, for foster-brithers to take that kind o' loup thegither, and there's a lass down at Selkirk, Jeanie Leslie, that maybe wad hae nae objection——"

"No, no, Davie! Let us make no rash engagements. If you are married first, I shall appear at your wedding—if the priority should be mine, I expect the like favour from you."

"It's a bargain, Mr Norman! But ye hae gotten a long start, and the odds are that ye win the race."

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRONG MAN BOWED DOWN.

MR EWINS received the intimation of his reprieve with great joy, which, however, was somewhat diminished when he came to understand that unreserved disclosure before a magistrate could alone insure his safety. Accustomed to traverse the paths of that debatable ground which separates the realms of honesty and swindling, he had a strong antipathy to legal functionaries of every kind ; and, considering that his revelations, even when leniently construed, were not likely to reflect much credit on his character, it was perhaps natural that he should display some symptoms of reluctance. However, there was nothing for it but submission ; and he gave me his solemn word that he would speak with perfect candour, or at least with as near an approach to it as the infirmities of human nature would allow. It was arranged, moreover, that he should confine himself simply to the details of the scrip transaction, omitting all mention of Littlewoo, or the fraudulent arts that had been used for obtaining

information as to the decisions of the Board of Trade.

I was also able in some measure to relieve the anxiety of Mr Shearaway, by the assurance that ere long the myrmidons of the law would be hot upon the traces of Speedwell ; after whose apprehension it would be comparatively easy to bring Littlewoo to a proper sense of his folly, and induce him to return to his father's roof. But I had now to undertake a much more difficult task, for the performance of which great tact and forbearance were required.

Although I was in possession of a clue by following which the whole mystery could be discovered, I had no direct personal interest—at least none which I could openly avow—in forwarding the investigation. I was not authorised in any way to act for Mr Beaton—nay, considering the terms upon which that gentleman and I had parted, any voluntary interference on my part with a matter so nearly affecting his character, could not be otherwise than offensive. Therefore, I had arrived at the conclusion that it was my duty, under the circumstances, to seek another interview with Mr Beaton, even at the risk of exposing myself to further contumely and insult.

His mansion had already something of a melancholy and deserted look. No eager throng was at the door ; most of the window-blinds were drawn down ; and a sepulchral silence now reigned where the hum and bustle of active commerce had been so rife. The tall Swiss-like porter no longer occupied the chair in

the hall, which had been taken possession of by a dirty, slovenly individual—just that kind of Cerberus whom you would expect to find on duty at a spunging-house. One or two other fellows of the same stamp were lounging in the lobby; and, from their appearance and free-and-easy deportment, it was quite obvious that some exceedingly vigilant creditor, despairing of Mr Beaton's ultimate solvency, had put an execution into the house. From those gentlemen it was of course hopeless to expect any information; but, in answer to my repeated summons, a grave respectable-looking man, whom I took to be Mr Beaton's groom of the chambers, appeared, and gave me to understand that an interview with his master was impossible.

“Mr Beaton,” he said, “was ill—in great distress—quite unable to attend to business, and had given strict orders that he was on no account to be disturbed.”

“I have no wish, my friend,” said I, “to be importunate; but suffer me to have a minute's conversation with you apart, out of the hearing of these men, and I do not despair of convincing you that it is absolutely necessary that I should see Mr Beaton.”

The man shook his head doubtfully, but ushered me into a small parlour, the door of which he carefully closed.

“Sir,” said he, “I do not know who you are; but, being a gentleman, you would not, I am sure, intrude at a time of such sorrow. It is no secret now, for the newspapers are full of it, that Mr Beaton has sustained great losses. His establishment is already for the

most part broken up, and you will no doubt understand why those men are stationed in the hall. Now, sir, if you come upon business, I can assure you that Mr Beaton is, for the present, quite unfit to attend to anything of the sort. I have been in his service for more than eight years, but I never saw him in such a distressing state as he is in just now. I do not think he has closed his eyes for the last two nights, and it is quite heart-breaking to hear him moaning and muttering in his room."

"But, my friend," said I, "suppose I come for the purpose and with the power of giving him relief, or, at any rate, of telling him that which will free him from the sorest anxiety?"

"I do not know how that can be, sir. What he feels, more than any thing else, are the wicked reports that have been circulated reflecting on his character, and which have already got into the newspapers."

"It is precisely on that account I am here. I have the means of enabling him to refute those calumnies, and to expose a vile conspiracy of which he has been made the victim. But, in order to do so, I must see and confer with Mr Beaton."

"Well, sir, if you will give me your name, I shall do my best to persuade him to see you."

"That is precisely what I cannot do," I replied. "I am known to Mr Beaton; but if I were to send up my name without explanation, I am almost certain that he would refuse to receive me."

The servant was evidently perplexed.

“I have positive orders,” said he, “to admit no one; and I would not for the world be less attentive to my master’s wishes now than in his most prosperous days. But your business, as you have stated it, sir, seems to be so important, that I should perhaps do wrong if I were to adhere strictly to his order. Therefore I shall at any rate make him aware that a stranger is most anxious for an interview.”

He left the room, and presently returned.

“I don’t know what to make of it, sir,” he said. “I am not sure whether Mr Beaton quite comprehended what I said, for he uttered no word, but simply waved his hand. I cannot tell whether he meant that as a sign of refusal or not; but, on the whole, I think I may venture to show you into his room. You must, however, be very distinct as well as short in your explanations, for I cannot help fearing that these calamities have somewhat affected his mind.”

I entered the library without any announcement. There, at the table, his head resting on his hand, sat Mr Beaton—not proud, vigorous, impulsive, and passionate, as at our former interview, but wan, listless, dejected, and apparently unconscious of my presence. He did indeed look up when he heard me enter, but there was no recognition in his eye, which presently began to wander, and he relapsed into his former attitude. The strong man was bowed down. A ten-years’ prisoner in the dungeons of the Bastille could not have worn a more melancholy aspect.

I addressed him by name; but he did not seem at

first to recognise me. However, when I told him who I was, a sudden consciousness seemed to flash across him. He started and shrank, as if he had received a galvanic shock : he drew his hand across his forehead, and the light returned to his eye.

“ Sinclair—Norman Sinclair ? ” said he. “ Wretched boy ! what devil has brought you here ? Come you to exult over my ruin ?—to gloat on the humiliation of the broken merchant ? Hold—not a word. I see by your face that you are about to say you pity me. Dare not for your life—as you hope for salvation—say that to me ! I am not mad yet, though the blood is seething in my brain ; but your pity—yours—would make me more frantic than the veriest wretch that tosses his straw in Bedlam ! Beware ! madness has gifts of its own. If it robs a man of reason and awakes within him the ferocity of a beast, it endows him with the strength of a giant ! ”

“ You quite misunderstand my purpose, Mr Beaton,” I replied. “ Let what has passed between us be altogether forgotten. I come to you as I would come to an absolute stranger, bearing certain intelligence of the utmost moment, which, I pray, in justice to yourself, you will allow me to disclose.”

“ Oho ! you have made a discovery, have you ? Perhaps you have ascertained that I have been cheated by some of the hundred scoundrels in whom I was idiot enough to place confidence ; and you think to gain credit for magnanimity by exposing the thefts of a petty rogue ? What care I for their miserable lar-

ceries? Let them go, and swindle elsewhere in a world that is made up of swindling! I have had enough of it. Fortune is gone; position is gone; and—O my God, that I should live to say it!—my reputation is gone also! Boy—I bear you no love! You bearded me when my power was great—and in that perhaps you were wise—but I have not forgotten how you thwarted me! In prosperity I never would have forgiven what I held to be an insult—adversity makes me prouder still. I will take nothing from your hands. Leave me, sir! Your presence here is but an additional torment.”

“No, Mr Beaton,” said I, “I shall not leave you until you have heard what I have to say. Both of us have Scottish kindred blood, and I hold by the tradition of my country, that nothing can obliterate that tie. It is no petty larceny that I have discovered, but the actual fraud, forgery, and deep-laid scheme of villany that has led to such disastrous results. To you I wish to make the disclosure, leaving the action entirely in your power.”

“Why, this is better and better!” cried Mr Beaton. “It is not enough that I have been duped, cozened, betrayed, but you must needs come to enlighten me as to the manner of it, and explain the juggling tricks by which my fortune has been conjured away! But you know, you can know, nothing—absolutely nothing! That hound Dobigging, whom I took from a garret to be my confidential agent, has sold me, and has fled. I care not whither he has gone. Let the deep swallow

him up—let him perish in a stabber's brawl—let him haunt with the Mormons or join the Latter-Day Saints—what is his destiny to me? Heaven help me! I am too broken-hearted even to wish for vengeance!”

“It is true,” I said, “that Dobigging has fled. But there is another, his accomplice, still within reach, against whom there is damning proof. He can be convicted, and his conviction will at once clear your reputation. O sir! do not wrong me—do not wrong yourself—so far as to suppose that any meaner or baser motive than a sincere wish to serve you has impelled me to intrude upon your privacy. I know that I offended you once, because I chose to act according to my own judgment, and you now almost admit that I was right in doing so. If my language was too bold or my manner too peremptory, surely these are faults which may be easily forgiven. Can you think that one who may unwittingly have failed in respect when he was poor and you were prosperous, would now come before you, entreating that you would listen to his story?”

Mr Beaton regarded me wistfully for more than a minute without speaking, and then said—

“My brain is so perplexed that I cannot fathom motives. I don't understand you, young gentleman. The men whose fortunes I have made forsake and malign me; and you, whose fortune I nearly marred—though, God knows, without any ill intention—force yourself upon me, and say that you are willing and able to vindicate my honour. Come now—be candid! You must see some advantage to be derived from this.

Friends, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, are always willing to oblige, until they are asked to strain friendship to that point that may compromise their credit or their purse. At one time I had friends upon whom I might rely ; but it is the curse of the speculator, when he ventures upon dangerous ground, that he must thenceforth walk alone. His only followers are parasites, who desert the staggering man. And what are you ? Kinsman, in some sort, you are ; but you owe me no gratitude—have no good offices to thank me for. What am I to make of this ? ”

“ You ask me for my motive, Mr Beaton,” I replied. “ Is not duty a sufficient answer ? If I know of a deed of villany by which an innocent man has been wronged, am I not bound by duty to disclose it to him, even though he were an utter stranger ? But let that pass, for time is very precious. Of the value of my information you may form a clear estimate when I tell you that I know the party by whom the scrip was forged and uttered, and that I have evidence to substantiate the accusation.”

“ And the man whom you suspect or accuse is still within the reach of justice ? ”

“ He is—at least I have every reason to believe so. He considers himself safe from detection, for his plot was most cunningly contrived. But it will be necessary to act immediately ; for, if he should once take the alarm, it may be difficult to have him apprehended ; and, without a public trial, the particulars of the forgery cannot be ascertained.”

“Not ascertained!” cried Mr Beaton, almost savagely. “Let the liability fall on whom it may, if I—Richard Beaton—swear in the face of God and man that I never signed such documents, who will dare, fallen as I am from fortune, to disbelieve it?”

“Alas!” said I; “you do not yet comprehend the full infamy of the transaction. The forgery lay in the engraved body of the documents—the signature was your own!”

Beaton rose from his seat, reeled, and fell back heavily. I rushed to his assistance, and was about to give the alarm, when he caught hold of me convulsively, and said, in a choking tone—

“Stop, stop, boy!—don’t—don’t ring the bell!—I shan’t have a fit now, if I can help it. Give me water—there—now throw the window open! There is a sound in my ears like the surge of an angry sea! Keep quiet. I shall be better soon. You don’t know me—I am subject to these attacks. Open that drawer, please—you’ll find a phial—give me thirty drops in water—thirty, observe, not more! There is a measure beside it. Thanks! That, unless the doctors lie, will bring down my pulse. Now leave me for half an hour—not a word about this to my servant—and then come back. I shall be able to speak to you then.”

I obeyed; but, notwithstanding his injunction, I could not help asking Barker, the valet, whether his master had recently taken medical advice?

“Not very lately, sir, though I am sure he needs it; for one day about a month ago, hearing a noise, I

made bold to enter the library, and found master in a fit. Of course I sent for the doctor instantly, but he wouldn't bleed him—they never do bleed nowadays, which I think is rather queer, for when I was a boy they used to bleed us every spring. So he gave him some stuff in a small bottle, not bigger than my thumb, of which he takes rather less than might do for the drink of a wren. It does not stand to reason, sir, that that can do a man any good. But master never could abide the doctors."

"And Miss Beaton, my friend—where is she, and how does she bear this trial?"

"Like an angel, sir. She seems to think of nothing but master's distress; and would fain either be with him, or coax him out of that gloomy room, where there is so much to make him sad; but he won't listen to her; indeed he has only seen her once since the crash came. I am sure I wish he would move about the house a little, were it only for the dear young lady's sake; for Mrs Walton is in a terrible taking, and vows that she has been ruined by her friends, though I don't see how that can be, unless she has found a fortune since she came to this house. It's a hard thing, when grief comes, to be set upon by an angered woman."

Poor Barker, though at other times the most discreet of servants, was evidently under the influence of that contagious sympathy which brooks no control; and would, I doubt not, have proceeded to favour me with a fuller account of the proceedings of Mrs Walton,

had I not deemed it right to waive all further discourse, and return to the library.

I found Mr Beaton to all appearance much better—indeed wonderfully composed ; and his manner towards me was quite altered.

“Sit down, Mr Sinclair,” he said, “and let me say a few words before we attend to this woeful business. Your visit, sir, has done me some good. When you came into this room, I was—I shall not shrink from owning it—driven to the very brink of despair. I have heard that over men in such a state the tempter has an awful power ; and now I know that it is so, for I felt as if goaded on by an irresistible impulse to try the coward’s remedy, and hide the disgrace of the bankrupt within the grave of the suicide ! Do not, however, suppose that mere misfortune, or even the treachery of those whom I had trusted, would have made me act so vilely. What nearly drove me mad was the thought—nay, the certainty—that the men with whom I had been associating as equals—my political friends—they who were wont to come to me for advice, and fawn upon me for favours—would henceforth regard me with contempt and scorn ! Ay, and it was no fancy ! Once, and but once, before I knew the worst, but not before rumour had been busy with my name, I went down to the House, thinking that my appearance there might at all events tend to silence calumny. By heaven, sir, I was already an attainted man ! I heard my name mentioned

among groups in the lobby, who broke up and dispersed as I approached. I essayed to speak to a minister of the crown: he was busy, and could not attend to me now! That pompous owl, Sir George Smoothly, who the day before would have caught me by both hands and poured forth his dull inanities, now measured his sense of the distance between us by a bow as stiff and ceremonious as that with which he would have dismissed an importunate deputation. Some few hearty old fellows, but they were not of our set, nodded to me, and spoke kindly; but what galled me most of all was the exorbitant affection and interest in my behalf exhibited by the Treasury Whip, who, taking me aside, implored me to tell him in what possible way he could be of service to me! I could not answer at the moment as I should have done, for my voice failed me for anger, which was not diminished when he whispered confidentially in my ear that he hoped I would give him due intimation when I should apply for the Chiltern Hundreds! The full sense of my degradation flashed upon me. I left the House, never to enter it again.

“Then came the domestic torture—clamorous creditors—an execution—and, worst of all to endure, the cold-blooded taunts of a selfish woman, who, profiting by my prosperity, regarded my downfall only as it affected herself, and dwelt upon it as a heinous wrong. But enough of this! I am becoming garrulous—a sure token that my mind is giving way.

“But it shall not fail me yet! My honour must be cleared before I lapse into the state of the hopeless babbling idiot. You say that you have the means of showing me how to accomplish that. Do so; and you will render me a service immeasurably greater than I ever received from man. But, I warn you, look not for gratitude from me. The woodman who took the frozen serpent into his bosom, and warmed it till it could use its fangs, was taught at last the true value of that vaunted commodity; nor was his lesson a more cruel one than mine! That word shall never more pass my lips in the way of profession, nor shall it again beguile my ear. Knowing this, do you still adhere to your offer?”

“I do.”

“Reflect that you are holding out your hand to a drowning man! If you are not confident in your own strength, his clutch may be a fatal one. Pause ere you decide. There must be no paltering here—no vain conceits of boyish chivalry! If you undertake the responsibility of clearing my fame, and yet fail in doing so—young man, the curse of a broken heart will haunt you to your grave!”

“Mr Beaton,” I replied, not unawed by the solemnity of his words, “the issue of all things depends upon a higher will than ours, and it would be rash presumption to deny the possibility of failure. But I have not undertaken this matter lightly. My conviction is that I can furnish you with the means of

exposing a base conspiracy, and of vindicating your honour from any slanderous imputation. More I cannot undertake. It will remain with you, after you have heard my story, to determine what course you should pursue."

"You offer fairly," said Mr Beaton, after a pause; "and more it would be unreasonable to expect. But you must make your communication elsewhere. Ay, sir, the truth will out! This brain of mine is in such a whirl that I could not follow your statement. I must have rest—rest and sleep—ere I can devise anything. If nature will not come to my aid, art must do her office, and that I shall presently try. But you say this business will not brook delay. Well, then, I have yet one friend in whom I think I can put some trust. Honest, plain-spoken John Poins, whose warnings I have so often laughed to scorn, will, out of old regard, take some interest in my character. Go to him—say it was my wish—and tell him all. What he advises, that will I readily confirm; for I have lost faith in my own judgment, and must learn betimes to accommodate myself to my new character. Fool—ay, fool will be the word—if I escape being branded as a knave!"

"Nay, Mr Beaton——"

"Hush, my good lad! I think I know what you would say, but let us have no more delusions now! I believe you are honest, and wish me well. More I may say hereafter; but farewell for the present. Bid

my servant come to me—perhaps I may be able to sleep now.”

“ Oh ! ” I heard him murmur, as I left the room, “ but for *her* sake, who must not think that her father was a dishonoured man, I would be content to sleep indeed, and never waken more ! ”

CHAPTER V.

AN UNEXPECTED CONFIDENCE.

AT the door, near which the ill-favoured Israelitish sentinel was still on duty, I encountered Mr Lumley, who had called for the purpose of inquiring after the family, and to leave his card. I owed that gentleman some apology for not having earlier availed myself of his frank offer of hospitality, which he evidently meant to be the prelude to a more intimate acquaintanceship; and I was glad to have an opportunity, after we left the house, of pleading my excuse on the ground of pressing avocations. Lumley, who, of all men I ever knew, was the least touchy, merely laughed, and said—

“I have seen so much of literary men, Mr Sinclair, and am so well acquainted with their habits, that I never consider them as amenable to the laws of punctilio in minor matters. I will not quarrel with a man because he does not choose to cut up his forenoon by calling on me, or even because he won't name a day for dining; but I am not philosopher

enough to pardon the eccentricity which leaves me, in the capacity of a Lucullus, to the contemplation of a solitary banquet. I regard a dinner engagement as a thing almost sacred ; but as you have given me no absolute pledge, I have as yet nothing to complain of. But a truce to apologies ; the rather because, from meeting you here, I conclude that you dissent from the general opinion that misfortune is of itself sufficient to loosen the bonds of courtesy."

I replied that I had business with Mr Beaton, which was the object of my recent call.

"Ah, indeed !" said Lumley. "And is it fair to ask how he seems to bear his reverses ?"

"More quietly, on the whole, than I should have expected, Mr Lumley. But the blow was a dreadful one to a man of his proud and imperious disposition."

"Doubtless. People of the Napoleonic stamp, who have never known what contradiction is, cannot look ruin in the face. They have so long denied Providence, that they consider themselves arbiters of their own fate ; and when they find themselves inextricably fixed in the toils, they regard life itself as a chattel which they are entitled to throw away. That was the old pagan heroic notion ; and it is not quite exploded yet. Brutus ran upon his sword—he knew no better. With us, God's chastisements for presumption are acknowledged by a dose of prussic acid, or the discharge of a trumpery pistol."

"I trust and believe, Mr Lumley, nothing of the kind is to be apprehended here."

“ Perhaps not. It is a matter of temperament, and question of interest and affection. Then you have not seen Miss Beaton ? ”

“ I have not. To tell the truth, I have not been on visiting terms with the family.”

“ And yet you are a relation ! That seems strange.”

“ It may be so. But I should imagine that Mr Lumley must know many instances of near kindred existing without intimacy.”

“ Nay, I have no desire to penetrate into secrets. But it grieves me to think what the consequences of this reverse may be to Miss Beaton. So young, so beautiful, so gifted—so utterly unscathed by the frivolity and heartlessness of those with whom she has been compelled to mingle—what a fearful revelation is about to dawn upon her ! Faces that she never yet saw except wreathed in smiles, will now be averted ; hands that were eagerly held out for her acceptance will be withdrawn ; the voice of flattery will be hushed ; and she, than whom the angels are not more innocent and blameless, will be made to suffer that penalty which the world, often lenient to crime, inexorably inflicts upon misfortune ! ”

The tone in which Lumley uttered these words clearly evinced the genuineness of his feeling, but I did not hear him without experiencing a certain strange emotion. Whence this warm and unusual interest towards Mary on the part of a man who had hitherto maintained the character of a casual acquaintance, openly disavowing the wish to cultivate a closer

intimacy? It suited Mr Lumley to represent himself, half sportively, as a confirmed bachelor, whose attentions to the fair sex, though always marked by an air of chivalric courtesy, which became him exceedingly well, and was indeed part of his nature, were to be construed simply as acts of general homage, without reference to any one particular idol; but the very frequency of that assertion was calculated to raise doubts as to its sincerity. He was in the prime of life, eminently handsome, with a mind highly cultivated, and the most polished and winning manners. He was in possession of a large and unencumbered fortune, with the prospect, not very remote, of succeeding to a title; and he was universally regarded as one of the most agreeable and popular men of the day. That he had hitherto escaped matrimony was, I knew, considered almost as a marvel, so multitudinous had been the silken snares that were set for him; but he moved through them all with a superb and smiling indifference, very galling indeed to the experienced maternal huntresses, who were justifiably provoked that so noble an animal should still remain at large. But no one doubted that Lumley, if he so pleased, might make easy conquest of the heart of any woman; and many believed that his gay *insouciance* was feigned, and that one day or other, when he should discover an object worthy of his affections, he would enact the part of lover with an energy and devotion rarely manifested in these degenerate and unimpulsive times.

I own, therefore, that I felt a slight qualm of jealousy come over me, which was not diminished when Mr Lumley proceeded as follows :—

“ If there is one thing more than another calculated to make a man loathe the organised hypocrisies that surround us, it is the sordid baseness of those fellows who, destitute of sufficient wit or manliness to push their own fortunes, lie in wait for heiresses. Compared with them, the led-captain and parasitical haunter of great houses—the satellite who is ready to drive, ride, hunt, jest, drink, or play the buffoon, in return for his board and lodging—is truly a noble character. He, at all events, shows no false colours : the other is a pirate and a villain ! To simulate ardent love, without even the slightest glow of affection—to conceal the most frightful rapacity under the guise of a generous disinterestedness—to profess virtues which they secretly despise, and to decry vices which they habitually practise—these are the tricks which fortune-hunters use ; and, stale though they be, they still command success, for woman is fond and credulous, and the knave who knows how to touch her vanity can easily win possession of her heart. Never, in the course of my long experience of London society, have I known a girl more beset by such suitors than Miss Beaton ; and as the prize was supposed to be a great one, the efforts to win it were proportionally desperate. Now, out of all that crowd of professed adorers, how many, think you, would this day step forward to claim her hand ? Not one ! Nay, had an engagement been

made, however solemn its nature, the plighted honour would be violated without hesitation, remorse, or shame."

"If, however," said I, "no such engagement exists, there can be no desertion. As for the defection of her admirers, if they be what you describe them, Miss Beaton can have no cause to regret their withdrawal."

"You think so?" said Lumley. "Well, that is a man's view of the case, but I suspect women are not quite so philosophical. The classic poets tell us that the gods were fond of incense, without caring much by whom it was offered, and that they became very angry when their altars ceased to smoke. Something of the same feeling, I apprehend, belongs to women. Neglect is hard to bear. In Catholic countries that cause alone provides inmates for half the nunneries."

"They are, at all events, convenient receptacles for worn-out coquettes," was my reply. "But I must bid you good-day, Mr Lumley—I am somewhat in haste."

"Nay, I can mend my pace, as our way seems to be the same. But you don't seem to relish my talk; and indeed no wonder, for I have been descanting very generally upon the subject of morals, which is always idle and tedious. Now I, being a singular sort of person, and apt to say strange things at strange times, feel a strong impulse to tell you, that now, since the field is clear, and no possible misconception can exist as to my motives, I see no reason why I should not approach your fair cousin, and in all

humility pray her to enrich me by the inestimable gift of her hand."

"What! you, Mr Lumley—you?"

"Even so, Mr Sinclair! Of course I shall not pretend that I am possessed by the devouring passion of youth, which would be ridiculous in a man of my years, and moreover is no way complimentary, because youthful passion is usually as brief as it is intense, and burns out like a fire of straw. But I am confident of this, that if the happiness of any woman is intrusted to me, it will be safe in my keeping. I should not even ask for a declaration of affection. Confidence is all I require, and I would trust to time to do the rest. One thing only is indispensable. The woman to whom I pay my addresses must have her heart wholly free."

Imagine my consternation on hearing this avowal! Of what avail was it to me that Lord Pentland should have been checkmated, and the herd of Gorgets, Pophams, and Linklaters dispersed, if this unexpected and most formidable rival were to present himself at a moment when his splendid qualities could not but appear enhanced by the devotion which dictated such an offer? In spite of myself, I could not help recognising and admiring the noble nature of the man, contrasting as it did so strongly with the selfishness and cowardice of the rest.

"Mr Lumley," said I, "you should consider—you must be aware that I am not a fit person for confidences of this kind."

"That, Mr Sinclair, seems to me to depend very

much on the state of your own feelings. Look you, sir : I am quite aware that this is an extraordinary avowal, such as not one man out of ten thousand would make to another, situated as we both are, at least according to my conjecture and conviction ; but more than half the miseries of life, and many of the most incurable, arise from want of candour, caused, it may be, by shyness or false delicacy, but not on that account the less pernicious. I am no babbler ; but when I think an explanation is desirable, either for my own sake or that of another, I never hesitate to offer or to request it. I have told you without reserve my views upon a subject so delicate as to be almost sacred. I have done so, because I wish to ascertain whether those views do not interfere with your own."

"I must needs confess, Mr Lumley, that you do not exaggerate when you call this an extraordinary avowal! Were you other than I believe you to be, I should peremptorily decline further discourse upon such a topic : as it is, I guard myself from all admissions, and ask, in the first place, what it is that you conjecture or suspect?"

"Then I shall speak frankly to you, as a man whom I hold to be of approved honour. I believe—why, it matters not—that you love Miss Beaton, and hope to win her. No one can challenge your right to do so, and no one can upbraid you with presumption. But I need not tell you that another man may have the same right, provided his motives are equally sincere. Now, I am not about to propose to you that we should sit

down, like swains in a pastoral, and dispute as to the intensity of our respective passions. I shall at once assume that yours is the stronger ; mine, as I have already hinted to you, is of a sober kind, and, if I can trust myself, very nearly unselfish, because her future happiness is the sole object of my solicitude. Were the lady—let us style her so—less perfect than she is, I might think that wealth, position, and so forth, such as I have to offer, would have some weight in determining her choice ; but, as she is, I dismiss such a thought as profanation. Are you disposed to imitate my frankness, and say whether this conjecture as to the state of your feelings is the true one ?”

“ You urge me closely, sir,” said I—“ more closely than the ordinary usages of society warrant. How if I decline holding any further communication on the subject ?”

“ Then,” replied Lumley, “ I shall simply conclude that I have failed to read Mr Norman Sinclair’s character aright.”

“ Hear, then, the truth ! for, since we have gone so far, there need be no disguise. Mr Lumley—I do love Miss Beaton—have loved her long, and shall strive by God’s help to win her. Are you answered ?”

“ Yes,” replied Lumley. “ I expected nothing less, and I thank you for your candour. It must be plain to you, Mr Sinclair, that, after what has passed between us, we never can be rivals. It is because I respect you that I have spoken so freely—nay, importunately ; and your answer shows that you have a

generous and a noble heart. Be not afraid that I shall thrust myself between you and your happiness. Not by word, or look, or sign shall you have cause to suspect that Henry Lumley has abused your confidence, or used it so as to cast even the slightest obstacle in your path. May you be happy and prosperous: so much I can say without a pang."

"But wherefore did you tell me this?" said I. "Why force me to a confession which I may hereafter regret, seeing that, however deeply a man may love, success is what he cannot command?"

"And supposing that you were to fail," said Lumley, "think you that you could regret your love? Ah no, believe it not! Pure and devoted love is of the essence of the Deity—holy as prayer, exalted as adoration. What though it may be blighted, or cut short, or doomed to bitter disappointment—the memory of it may bring tears to the eye, but it never can flush the cheek with shame. But I think I understand your meaning. You would be content to grieve and sigh alone, but your pride is wounded by the thought that another should know your sorrow. Alas! and would you have it believed that you are exempt from the trials of humanity—that you cannot suffer, be thwarted, weep, mourn, and lament, like the rest of your fellows? My friend, he who is so exempt—if there ever was such a being—stands in fearful peril, for the chastisements so long delayed are accumulating above him, and will burst like thunder on his head."

"Mr Lumley," said I, "I shall be as frank with you

as you possibly can desire. You have this day shown yourself to me in a new phase of character. Words have been spoken between us which never can be recalled or forgotten. You have forced your secret upon me, and you have compelled me to surrender mine. I am therefore entitled to a full explanation. Do you withdraw your claim to Miss Beaton's hand?"

"I cannot withdraw it, Mr Sinclair," replied Lumley; "for this excellent reason, that I have not yet preferred it. But come—we must have no jealousy here. You ought, I think, to be convinced that I mean fairly by you: otherwise what could have been easier for me than to have addressed myself at once to old Mr Beaton, or that very clever sister of his, Mrs Walton, who would move heaven and earth to effect a wealthy marriage for her niece? They, at all events, would not have been averse to listen to such a proposal. It is not too much to assume that I would have enlisted the family influence in my favour—a very considerable advantage, let me tell you, in the prosecution of a matrimonial scheme. All this I forego, not for your sake, but because I have reason to think—not from my own observation, but from what I have gathered elsewhere—that you have gained so much of the lady's favour as to meet with no discouragement. Had it been otherwise, I might have taken a different course. As it is, I repeat that I am not, and never can be, your rival."

"I understand you now! From the bottom of my heart I thank you, Mr Lumley; and if I have appeared,

even for a moment, to misapprehend your motives, my excuse must be that very few men, if indeed any other than yourself, would have spoken or acted thus."

"Ah, well!" said Lumley, relapsing into his usual manner. "It is a gratifying thing to know that I have at last met with a human being who will or can understand me. Do you know, Mr Sinclair, it is my hard fate that no one gives me credit for sincerity. When I talk in the ordinary light vein which suits my temperament, I am regarded as a scoffer; when I speak warmly, and from the impulse of my heart, I am set down as a rank hypocrite. Such is my punishment for having neglected to tone down my conversation to the commonplace level of that of society, which tolerates neither flights nor fancies, is nervously apprehensive of satire, and recoils from enthusiasm as the manifestation of a troubled and disordered spirit. I am too old to mend now, else I would seriously apply myself to the cultivation of inanity. Farewell, Mr Sinclair! This conference, if we consider it rightly, ought to make us friends for ever."

"I have not words, Mr Lumley, to express what I feel——"

"Then say nothing more! It is enough that we understand each other. You know where I am to be found if you wish to see me; and, recollect, you have now a perfect right to apply to me in any difficulty."

We shook hands cordially and parted.

It was not until days had elapsed that I was able fully to appreciate or realise the splendid generosity

and exalted nobleness of this man's character. The explanation is, that I had, for the present, enough, and more than enough, on my hands to engross my whole attention. By an extraordinary combination of chances, I had become acquainted with the details of a conspiracy which I had pledged myself to Mr Beaton to unravel. Upon the success of my endeavour depended the vindication of his fair fame, which had been publicly impeached, and also the fulfilment of the one hope which was now the turning-point of my existence. I had also to rescue, if that could be done, an unfortunate youth from the toils of a desperate villain ; and, as yet, I had formed no distinct plan of operations. It is a true saying that the energies of men are roused in proportion to the greatness of the emergency ; but one grand condition of their activity is, that they must not be distracted or diverted from the leading object. So this conversation with Mr Lumley, which at another time would have engrossed the whole of my thought, passed from me with little effort, as, I fear, is the sorry requital of most instances of self-abnegation—very gladly received at the moment, but seldom afterwards acknowledged, as an undeniable claim for gratitude. One effect, however, it had, and that was, of strengthening my determination to prosecute this adventure to the uttermost.

CHAPTER VI.

A DETECTIVE OFFICER.

LAWYERS, like crabs on a kitchen-floor, make more noise than speed, and sometimes, to the vulgar eye, appear to retrograde instead of advancing. Many an ardent lover, on the eve of marriage, has had cause to curse the slow movements of those high priests of Themis, who, once in possession of those voluminous sheets of parchment from which the materials for a settlement are to be drawn, seem to be plunged in an enchanted reverie, and lose themselves amidst the tangled thickets and brakes of conveyancing. Yet, on an emergency, it is wonderful to see how keenly the lawyer can brace himself to his work ; how rapidly his acute and practised intellect seizes upon the salient points of his case, rejecting all superfluities ; with what unerring instinct he arrives at a conclusion ; and how clearly he perceives the course which ought, under the peculiar circumstances, to be pursued.

Misled by the extraordinary caution which he had exhibited at our first interview, I had done Mr Poins

the gross injustice of mistaking him for a sort of fossil; but no sooner was he made aware of the nature of my present business, and its vast importance to Mr Beaton, than he threw all other matters aside, and entered into the details with as much zest and zeal as though he had been a new-fledged barrister with his first brief before him. Not content with hearing my version of the story, he insisted upon personally interrogating both Flusher and Ewins; the former of whom stuck in all points to his text, whilst the latter exhibited some slight symptoms of dodging and lapses of memory, principally relative, however, to his own share in the transaction. But, on the whole, there was no discrepancy of any real importance.

“This is indeed a providential discovery,” said Mr Pains, after the examination was completed. “Not that I think there was anything in the circumstances of the case to justify a suspicion that my unfortunate friend was cognisant of the fraud; but the world is very censorious, and has no mercy for those who fall from a high position. Besides, many people have lost money through Mr Beaton’s failure, and it is no wonder that they should be rancorous. Men so situated, when they despair of recovering their stake, consider themselves entitled to make free with the character of the person by whose advice or example they have been guided, and hate him with an inveteracy all the stronger because their former blind belief is a direct reflection upon their judgment. I am deeply concerned for Beaton, my old schoolfellow and true

friend, though we did not always agree in opinion. But he was a wilful man, and would not listen to any warning."

"What, then, do you advise under present circumstances, Mr Poins?"

"Why, Beaton must be cleared, at all hazards. His fortune is past praying for, poor fellow; but we cannot let his character go. This scrip transaction must be thoroughly explained to the satisfaction of the public; and the evidence you have been fortunate enough to collect is sufficient, I think, to convict that scoundrel Speedwell of the felony. I wish, though, we had a more reliable witness than your American acquaintance, who has been treading upon very slippery ground, and even by his own account is not far short of an accomplice. I promise you he would hardly escape scathless from a rigid cross-examination. However, his latitudinarian notions will not avail Master Speedwell; and most criminal convictions depend upon the testimony of minor knaves. We must immediately apply for a warrant to have Speedwell apprehended upon a charge of felony."

"And how is that to be carried into effect? I am assured that the man has disappeared from London."

"Unless he has fairly fled the country, I have little doubt that he can be secured. The sagacity of some of our detective officers is quite wonderful, and their means of procuring information extraordinary; and I know one on whom I have the most perfect reliance. But I understood you to hint that, apart from Mr

Beaton's case, you had reason to wish that Speedwell should be brought to justice, and that you suspected him of foul play towards some other party for whom you felt an interest. Is it not so?"

"You are quite correct in your surmise, Mr Poins. A great deal depends upon that man's apprehension."

"Well then, after we have obtained the warrant, you shall see the officer; and if he thinks that your presence can be useful, and will not impede the arrest, I see no reason why you should not accompany him. I dare-say, now, you feel quite elated at the prospect of such an adventure?"

"Not elated, Mr Poins," said I. "But, having what I consider to be a sacred duty to perform—at all events, having pledged my honour not to abandon the task which I have undertaken—it is certainly my desire to be assured, by personal observation, that nothing has been left undone."

"Enough said," replied Poins. "Come to me this evening at eight. By that time the warrant will be made out, and the officer in attendance."

I would have given worlds had I been able, but for ten minutes, to gain an interview with Mary Beaton. I felt now as if I were, at last, her enlisted champion, entitled to a word of favour before I departed for the field. But that was utterly impossible; and, moreover, I had more prosaic business on hand. First and foremost, I had to coax Shearaway out of his resolution to return immediately to Edinburgh, which he had formed for divers reasons.

His clients, he said, were complaining of his protracted absence. In particular, one who had a case before the Court of Session, founded on the edict "*nautæ, caupones, stabularii*," touching the non-delivery by a railway company of a box of oranges, had written a letter intimating that his interests were not duly cared for, and threatening a Petition and Complaint against his neglectful doer. Then he felt his health suffering from over-banqueting, and the impossibility of getting free Saturday exercise at the noble game of golf, which he practised regularly in the north; and, lastly, he said that it was a very extraordinary thing, and disgraceful in a Protestant country, that a quiet elderly gentleman could not go home at night, through St James's Street or the Quadrant, without being accosted by a parcel of French Jezebels, who did their utmost to lug him into a lobster-house, or some similar haunt of abomination.

"We are all frail creatures, Norman," said Mr Shearaway; "and there's a madame, by no means ill-looking, who makes up to me every night. Troth, laddie, I think it is full time that I was buckling up, and clear of such temptations!"

Having with some difficulty persuaded Shearaway to postpone his departure, I had next to hunt up Davie Osett, who, being a fellow of readiness and resource, might, I thought, be of use to me in the course of the expedition. Davie required no exhortation. He was delighted with the prospect of active service, and promised to be ready to start at a moment's notice.

It would have been unkind as well as impolitic to have quitted London without administering a few crumbs of comfort to the disconsolate Ewins, who was sorely chop-fallen, not only from the consciousness of having landed himself in an exceedingly ugly scrape, but also for lack of occupation and excitement, he being for the present debarred from all traffickings on the Stock Exchange. However, being a shifty man, and one not given to waste the precious hours in unavailing sorrow, I found him engaged in concocting a prospectus for the establishment of a new joint-stock bank in Pennsylvania, the principal feature being that the shareholders were to have credit for twice the amount of the capital subscribed, the notes being declared inconvertible.

“ I reckon it’s the best plan ever yet chalked out for the unlimited circulation of paper,” quoth Ewins; “ and the beauty of it is, that you can nohow be made to book-up, for a chap who is his own creditor can take things mighty easy!”

Satisfied that Ewins was safe in the mean time, and that there was no risk of his bolting without notice, I made my own simple preparations, and then repaired to the chambers of Mr Pains.

Seated by the fire, and reflectively sucking the knob of an enormous walking-staff, was a stout middle-aged man of a ruddy countenance, from which, however, all symptoms of intelligence seemed to be banished. So little of distinctive peculiarity was there in his features, that you might have met him twenty times without being able to recognise him, unless, indeed, you had

encountered a fixed stare from his eyes, which were unlike any that I ever saw in the head of a human being. They resembled those of a cat, the pupils being oblong instead of round, and capable of extraordinary expansion ; and when turned full upon you, the light which they emitted was more than magnetic—it appeared to have the power and effect of fascination. As if conscious of this miraculous gift, Mr Pocock—for such was the name of the acute detective officer—generally kept his eyes half shut ; and, seeing him thus, a casual observer would probably have set him down as a sleepy-headed person, whose natural torpidity had been deepened by copious libations of the strongest and the heaviest ale. In reality, Pocock was as little addicted to sleep as any weasel. His brain was constantly at work, like the lava seething within the heart of the placid Vesuvius.

Mr Poins introduced this worthy as my travelling-companion, who was already instructed how to act, subject to my advice and control.

“I could have done the job myself, sir,” observed Mr Pocock, “without troubling the gentleman ; but it’s like he wants to see what sort of game has been playing before I nabs my man. This Speedwell’s an old stager, but somehow or other he has contrived till now to keep on the windy side of the law ; least-ways there has been nothing boxed home to him, though I’ve more than once been put up to make inquiries. He’s a leary cove, and works on his own account, so that it is main difficult to stag him. Howsomedever, unless I

am out in my reckoning, he has been rubbing shoulders with the gallows. He has wakened up the insurance companies, and that means hanging."

"To what do you allude, Mr Pocock?" asked Poins.

"Why, Mr Poins, it's not my way to talk of professional business out of the office; but as we are all rowing in the same boat, it's as well you should know what sort of a chap this Speedwell really is. When I first know'd him, he was hanging about the bill-discounters, helping them to fleece greenhorns, and I des-say he made something in that line. Then he took to sporting, went on the turf; but although he was a sharp hand and stood well with the jocks, I hear that his betting-book did not balance on the right side. Fact is, he was too greedy to win. Well, you see, being short of the ready, he had to fall back on his old friends the bill-discounters, who made him pay through the nose for what money they lent him—thirty per cent was about the lowest rate. That went on so long as he could persuade any young fellow to put his name to the paper; but he soon ran short of flats, and then he had to come down with some security, or not a brass farthing could he raise. I then lost sight of him for about a year or so; till, being down on a little job at the York races, who should I spy but Speedwell, the biggest swell on the course, betting away at no allowance, with a roll of flimsies in his hand. 'My lad,' thinks I, 'it doesn't need a deep un to guess that you've been cutting out work for me, for them there leaves are

not of a kind that ever grow'd in your own garden ! ' In course, I said nothing, and pretended not to see him. Well, about two months after that, I was sent for by the manager of one of the big insurance offices.

" ' Pocock,' says he—for you must understand that he know'd me well, as I had done business for him before—' Pocock, do you happen to know a man of the name of Speedwell ? ' "

" ' Do I know my grandmother ? ' said I—' that cove's down in my perspective list. ' "

" ' Then he's other than a good one ? ' said the manager.

" ' As bad as may be,' says I. ' I s'pose you haven't been lending him money, sir ? ' "

" ' Not quite so green as that comes to ! ' said the manager. ' But do you consider him just an ordinary rogue, or something worse than that ? ' "

" ' That's a kevestion, sir,' says I, ' that ain't easy answered. Men doesn't go in for the gallows all at once. They begin small, and gets on from one thing to another, till the devil himself wouldn't like to be seen in their company. But it's fair to tell you that there's nothing down on our books against Speedwell as yet. ' "

" ' Harkye, Pocock ! ' says the manager, ' you're a shrewd intelligent fellow, and know more about human nature than many a parson. Would it surprise you to hear that this man Speedwell had been guilty of murder ? ' "

" ' Nothing surprises me,' says I. ' I've known a

respectable Quaker do that, and go to Meeting within half an hour after. It's not the thing I look to—it's the motive.'

" 'Very well put !' says he. 'Now, I'll tell you how the matter stands. Eighteen months ago, this Speedwell effected an insurance with us on the life of a person, whom he represented to be a gentleman of means residing in the north of England, for two thousand pounds. The papers seemed all right, so we passed the proposal. Only one premium was paid ; for, nine months after, we received intimation that the gentleman had died of apoplexy. That was unlucky ; but companies like ours must lay their account with such losses, and we paid the money. A short time ago, I happened, in conversation with a brother manager, to mention the circumstance, and he immediately pricked up his ears. "What did you say was the name of the insurer?" he asked. "Speedwell," said I. "By all that's infamous !" he cried, "he has served us the same trick. His nominee died, also of apoplexy, within three months !" Of course we had an investigation. There really had been such men, but they were people of no substance—not worth fifty pounds a-piece. We examined the doctor who had certified to their decease, for it is remarkable that they both belonged to the same neighbourhood. He bore a respectable character, but was very old, and nearly in his dotage. He was quite positive, however, as to the deaths by apoplexy. There now—what do you think of that, Pocock ?'

“ ‘ Have you inquired,’ says I, ‘ if there is any more insurances ? ’

“ ‘ Yes—two on the same life, and that a young one, and taken out from different offices.’

“ ‘ Then it’s my opinion, sir, that apoplexy’s all my eye ! Rely upon it the two gents has been made cold meat of, other than the ordinary way. Mayhap, after taking their grog with Speedwell, their neckcloths may have become inconveniently tight.’

“ ‘ That’s just my own notion,’ says the manager ; ‘ but it’s too late now to make a row about it. Here’s for your trouble, Pocock ; but keep an eye on that fellow—I hope he won’t escape you long.’

“ ‘ If he does, sir,’ said I, ‘ he will be the first of his litter that ever threw me out after I had fairly settled on the scent.’

“ And that, Mr Poins, is what I knows about Speedwell.”

“ Good heavens ! ” cried I, “ is it possible that such villanies can be perpetrated ? Why, the horrible narratives of the middle ages contain nothing more fiendishly atrocious ! ”

“ I doesn’t see what middle age has to do with it, master,” said the matter-of-fact Pocock, refreshing his nose with a comfortable modicum of snuff. “ According to my experience, the young uns is as bad as the old uns, and even a thought worse ; for when a man gets up in years he doesn’t care about the blowens, and it’s the blowens mostly that is at the bottom of all mischief.”

“Then let us start instantly!” said I. “There has been too much delay already. I shall never know a moment’s peace until this man is apprehended; for, beyond what he has to answer for in the matter of Mr Beaton, I strongly suspect that he has with him a wretched lad whom he may be implicating in his dark designs, if, indeed, no worse befall him!”

“It ain’t no use being in a flurry, master,” said Pocock, composedly. “The train we are to go by don’t start till 10.15, and it wants a full hour of that. Mr Pains, sir, you were good enough to ask me if I would take any refreshment. I never drink when on duty; but I is always the better of a night-cap before a long drive on the rail. I only sleep when I has nothing else to do. So, if you please, I’ll not object to a glass of brandy-and-water. Now, sir,” continued he, addressing himself pointedly to me, “take a hint from a man who has seen many a queer thing in his day, and never splash about when it can do no good. Wital energy is like bottled porter—keep it close corked till you want to have it out, else half the spirit goes away in froth. I warrant, now, for all your keenness, you don’t guess where we are bound for?”

I was forced to confess my ignorance.

“And I don’t know, neither,” said Pocock. “But I shall know in ten minutes, or thereby; for our business is done by system, and we have a scout department that keeps us, the head men as it were, alive to the motions of our lambs. Let me advise you, master. You’re just a thought too excited; and I recommend,

in your case, a double night-cap. You'll be all the better for it, and wake to-morrow as fresh as a daisy."

Here the colloquy was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Davie Osett, clad in a stupendous pea-jacket, and ready for any kind of devilry.

"I'm blithe to find you here, Mr Norman," said he. "I was feared I might be late, for I had to din the work for the next twa days into the ears of three as stupid idiots 'as ever handled a pair of compasses. But it's all right now ; and I am glad to see that ye have gotten a professional thief-taker, if I dinna misinterpret the calling of this respectable gentleman."

I doubt whether Pocock, in the whole course of his career, had ever met with a similar, though most undesigned insult. He met it with silence, only turning the full artillery of his eyes upon the offending borderer.

"Lord sake, man !" said Davie, "what's the use o' glowering at me like a wull-cat ? I'm nane o' your law-breakers, I trow, to be scared by the glint of your een."

"Hush, Osett !" said I ; "Mr Pocock's professional eminence entitles him to the highest respect, and it very ill becomes you to use language calculated to give him offence."

"I am sure I meant nane," said Davie ; "so I ask the gentleman's pardon. You maun forgie me, sir, for bluntness of speech, but we folk frae the north have a queer trick of calling things by their ordinary names."

"Enough said, young man !" replied Pocock, with a

gracious wave of the hand. "The Scotch is a creditable people, though a little behind the rest of the world ; and mayhap they don't quite comprehend the value and dignity of the profession."

"Ye are no far wrang there," said Davie.

Here a note was handed in to the detective officer.

"All right !" said he—"the bird has been marked down, and we shall come upon him at Torcaster. Now, Mr Pains, sir, I'll just drink your good health, wishing you many such jobs as this, with me to carry them through, and then we must be jogging. Keep your mind easy, sir ; the arrest is as good as made."

So saying, Mr Pocock slowly drained his glass, which he set down with a sigh of satisfaction, wound an enormous comforter round his neck, buttoned up his coat, and, taking the precedence due to his years and official position, led the way to the cab that was in waiting for us without.

"He may be a glegg chield that, in his way," whispered Davie, "but, my certie, he's no fit to hold the candle to M'Levy !"

CHAPTER VII.

MR POCOCK ON SOCIAL SCIENCE.

THROUGH the influence of the portly Pocock, who was immediately recognised by the railway officials, and treated with a degree of almost superstitious respect, we obtained a carriage for ourselves, and were soon in full career towards the north. The great man did not appear inclined for immediate colloquy; for, having drawn a travelling-cap over his eyes and swathed his limbs in a thick rug, he lay back in a corner, and in a minute or two gave token, by a nasal melody, that the muses were haunting him in his sleep. Davie Osett was disposed to be loquacious; but, finding that I was somewhat niggardly in my replies—for my thoughts were still occupied with the exciting events of the day—he desisted, took a hearty pull at a spirit-flask, and after humming a stanza or two, without the slightest pretensions to a tune, in honour of “bonnie Jean,” he emitted a preternatural yawn, and also succumbed to Morpheus. It was long before I could sleep. My brain was too much excited; and yet, somehow or

other, I could not reduce my thoughts to order. When pondering over my interview with Mr Beaton, it seemed as if the voice of Lumley interposed ; and then the harsh croak of Ewins would strike in, forming altogether a most strange and disagreeable medley. At last I fell into a dose ; and when I awoke, the sun had arisen, and we were speeding through a country unknown to me, but very beautiful—rich meadows, with thick irregular hedgerows, wherein kine, such as Cuyp might have taken for a study, were ruminating—on either side picturesque villages, with their quaint old gables and church spires ; and here and there some lordly mansion, seen through a vista of its ancestral woods. Let tourists and romancers and adorers of the wild and the sublime say what they please, there is nothing that recommends itself more to the eye and heart than the rural scenery of England.

I let down the window to enjoy the morning air that blew so wholesomely on my temples, and the change of temperature instantly roused Mr Pocock.

“Morrow, sir !” said he. “I hopes you’ve rested well. I’ve had my forty winks, and feel all the better for it.”

“I fear, Mr Pocock, that I have somewhat disturbed your slumbers.”

“Not in the least ways. I always like to look about me a bit before breakfast—specially in the country, which is invigorating. There’s no denying that it’s a pretty thing to see the sheep and cattle in the green fields, fattening up before they come to London, which

is their especial destination ; and I'm one of those who think that the agricultural interest ought to be supported. For all that the League chaps can say—and a precious lot of gabblers they are—it is the bones and beef of the nation ; and vot's liberty without beef and beer ? I hate innowations ; and though I am town-bred, no man will persuade me that the whiff of a hay-field isn't sweeter than the smoke of a factory."

" I quite agree with you, Mr Pocock ; but I should have expected that gentlemen of your profession would have taken a different view."

" Ah, you mean because the best part of our business comes from the other quarter ? Well, that's true. It's the rogues and swindlers that gives us work, and they are for the most part to be found in the big towns. I don't deny, master, that I likes to see trade brisk. It's a dull thing to be picking one's nails and doing nothing ; and I likes few things better than to hear of a good bit of burglary or a stunning plant that rekvires a man of gumption to ferret it out. It's in them sort of cases that a man can show his real parts ; and it's a happiness to know that the sporting prospects is good, as they say in *Bell's Life* when cub-foxes is plenty. I ought to be thankful for the blessings vouchsafed," added Pocock, piously, " for I've no end of covers to draw, and am sure of a find in each of them, though my district does not extend far beyond the liberties of London."

" Then, I suppose, you know most of the rogues by head-mark ? "

“ Lord love your greenness, no ! I leave that to the regular police. I never take any note of coves that have three black chalks against their name, and may be convicted on common evidence. That’s subordinates’ duty. In course, I know some of the poor things, and they knows me, and allers touches their hats to me in the street ; but they don’t bolt round corners, as they would do if they saw a common Peeler. They say to von another, ‘ That’s the great Mr Pocock, at the head of his profession—he’s on the look-out for swells, and don’t trouble hisself with cly-faking, or sich-like ; ’ and no more I does. If a gentleman *will* leave his handkerchief half out of his pocket, it’s no business of mine to look after it ; and I don’t keep an insurance office for tickers. I hate low practice, and leave that to my juniors.”

“ But if you take no cognisance of the outcasts of society, Mr Pocock, where can you find an adequate field for your genius ? ”

Not Aristotle, in reply to some rash question of his juvenile pupil Alexander, could have curved his lip with more delicate sarcasm than did Pocock when I hazarded the above interrogatory.

“ If there was common-sense in the world—ay, as much as there is timber in the head of my valking-staff—I’d be sitting this blessed day in Parliament, as member for Southwark or the Tower Hamlets ; ’stead of which they return fellows as are all slack-jaw, without von particle of gumption. It’s there I should be, master, if they know’d the right man for the right

place ; and I'm blessed if I wouldn't astonish the big-wigs ! See here, now. It's the fashion nowadays to shove everything else aside to make way for trade and commerce, which is about as sensible a thing for a great country to do, as if I was to order every other kind of vehicle off the street 'cause of a big adwertising van that goes nigh for to choke up the thoroughfare. Trade's a werry good thing, but it can take care of itself, and doesn't rekvire a wet nurse, which is vot Sir Bobby pretends to be. Fact is, people are in too great a hurry by half to get rich. They won't allow for the growing-time, which is clean contrary to nature ; and that's vot makes rascals, and finds work for gentlemen of my profession."

"Then you don't approve of the go-ahead principle, Mr Pocock ?"

"Not when the devil holds the stakes," replied the detective officer. "In my young days, a chap who expected to get on in the world began life as a shopman or a clerk, worked hard, didn't trouble hisself about finery, took his pint of beer and a stroll into the country on Sundays, and if his master gave him a rise of five pounds in his salary was as happy as a king. He didn't know what debt was, but was always laying by a little ; and in process of time he got on, became a foreman, or mayhap was taken into partnership, and might be chosen Deputy for his ward. Other lads than Dick Whittington have risen to be Lord Mayors from quite as small a beginning. But that sort of

living don't suit the young chaps nowadays. They must needs dress out like tip-top swells, go to casinos and theatres, smoke cigars, and take up with the blowens. Them sort of diversions runs away with cash, if a man has it ; and if he hasn't, why he must find it somewhere, and the till's just too convenient. Then the upper kind of clerks, they want to set up in business for themselves ; and as they have no capital, they get credit from the banks, hooking in their uncles, or some stupid old fogey, to be security. Then at it they go, driving a roaring trade—buying here, selling there—and working away with bills, 'stead of hard cash, which is the fountain of all prosperity. Lord love you ! I know them that would think nothing of taking up goods to the extent of twenty thousand pounds, and sending them on speculation to China or the Sandwich Islands ! That's vot they call a dashing business ; and the Parliament folks look at nothing but the export tables, make a song about them, and lick themselves all over, like a cat before rainy weather, for delight at what they call the progress of the 'country ! Vot signifies exports if they ain't paid for ? Eh, master ? Wouldn't a word or two about that do more good in Parliament than them flummery speeches about the grand principle of competition ? ”

“ Decidedly, Mr Pocock—some of our leading statesmen would derive no small benefit from your experience and advice.”

“ That's it, master ! They wants the eyes of a detec-

tive, and knows little or nothing of what goes on among the middle classes. And then they are easily gammoned! They make a show of knowing about trade when they are as innocent as babbies; and a real clever cove that has brass enough about him can persuade them of almost anything. But I was speaking just now of the smart young merchants. They *are* a lovely set of pups, and no mistake! They have their country-boxes, and their mistresses, and their horses, and their sideboards of plate, as fine as any nobleman in the land; and how think you they manage that? Why, by credit; which is just like wine or spirits—a good thing if taken moderately, but the devil and all if carried to excess. Well, there comes a time of pinch. Bankers get nervous, and insist on advances being paid up. Some of the chaps—who, mind you, are the grand exporters—quietly walk into the *Gazette*; not always without having made some little provision which it would bother their creditors to find out. They are the best of the whole lot, for they punish the joint-stock banks, who very richly deserve it. But some hold on—swindle, cheat, and forge—till they have ruined every soul within their reach, and then make a bolt to the Continent or America, leaving a written statement to show that they are the victims of unmerited persecution. Is's a rum world, sir—a rum world! and the more I sees of it, the more conwinced am I that no kind of reform will be worth a button unless it specially provides that the detective profession shall be represented in the House of Commons."

“The claim, as you set it forth, Mr Pocock, is certainly a strong one. But here we are at a station where a little time is allowed for refreshment ; and we may as well have a cup of coffee. As this is the race-day at Torcaster, we must look for scant attendance there.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RACE-DAY AT TORCASTER.

I DEFY even the sourest puritan to approach a race-course without feeling a touch of that excitement and enthusiasm which animates the crowd pouring along to witness the most popular sport of England. And nowhere is the passion for racing more strongly developed than in Yorkshire, that Thessaly of Britain, famous from time immemorial for the excellence of its steeds, and not without traditions of the Centaurs. As we approached Torcaster, all was bustle and commotion. Carts, carriages, gigs, and various nondescript kinds of vehicle—all packed to excess—were moving towards the course amidst a dense stream of pedestrians; and there was as much waving of flags and beating of drums as would have sufficed for a respectable skirmish, or, at all events, a contested election.

We had agreed to part company at the station; Osett remaining with me, while Mr Pocock was to pursue his investigations after his own fashion, ascertain what were the headquarters of the enemy, and report progress before making an arrest.

“ You sees, sir,” said that able and judicious officer, “ three is too many, and is apt to incur obserwation, which is a thing to be avoided. This here Speedwell isn’t by no means a simple sparrow, but a very wide-awake hawk, up to all manner of trap ; and if he were to twig what we are after, he’d be up and away before we could lay hold on him. Besides, I’ve to see one or two of the police here—stupid dolts they are, no doubt, but what can you expect from them country bumpkins?—and I always get through business best when I am by myself. The best hand I ever know’d in our profession—he’s dead now, more’s the pity—used to say to me, ‘ Pocock,’ says he—‘ Pocock, my lad, it’s my advice to you, if you expects to be a great man, never to diwulge your plans to any one, but keep your tongue in your cheek, and stick to them like wax. I never know’d no good come of axing another chap to think for you. It’s degrading, Pocock, to a man what has confidence in hisself. Bonaparte never did that ; and he was the long-headedest cove that has been in my time. My eye ! Vot a detective he’d have made, to be sure ! You mind what I say—chalk out your own line of operation, and stick to it in every case ; and you’re certain sure to be at the top of the profession when I’m below the roots of the daisies ! ’ Heaven bless him ! I loved him as if he had been my father. He left me this watch and onions, and the tidiest pair of handcuffs that ever were fastened round a wrist ! ”

Such an argument, of course, was irresistible. So

Davie and I separated from our Mentor, and betook ourselves to the Falcon Inn, which, we were informed, was the hostelry in Torcaster where we were most likely, in the then crowded state of the town, to find tolerable accommodation.

The Falcon was one of those queer rambling old houses which Dickens delights to describe, with wooden balconies, long ill-lighted passages, rooms shaped in utter defiance of any recognised geometrical figure, and occasional flights of steps, most perilous to the progress of the unwary or inebriated inmate. To obtain a private parlour was out of the question ; and the common room, into which we were shown, was crammed full of the inferior sort of sporting men, mingled with jocks, snatching, before proceeding to the race-course, a hasty repast, in which the decoction of the Chinese plant figured less conspicuously than beer and brandy. The general tone of the conversation was not of a kind that interested me, referring as it did to horses, with whose merits I was absolutely unacquainted ; besides, the Yorkshire dialect was foreign to my ear, and I could hardly follow the remarks of the various speakers. One thing, however, was clear, that if a magistrate who was determined to enforce the statutory fine for the utterance of profane oaths had been present, he might have carried home as much silver as would have made a handsome centre-table ornament.

Close to us were three Yorkshire betting-men, along with a jock who professed to have the last information

touching the events of the day ; and, in the midst of their confused colloquy, I heard mention of "Speedwell's Hippodrome." I was instantly on the alert.

"He stands to win," said the jock ; "but it's no go. I've been out on the sly, and seen him twice at exercise. He's showy, has a good stride, and will stand out of the ruck at first ; but when he doubles the corner, he won't be able to keep up the pace. He'll go in, though, very narrow ; for two horses that could lick his head off are made safe, that I happen to know ; but the real winner's beyond him, and he's been preciousy fenced." Here the jock lowered his voice, and nothing more was audible than such snatches as—"Tried the old trick—a ball you know—grooms wide-awake—chap sleeping in the stall. Fifty pound offered for a quiet look—got a taste of the pump for his pains. Poisoned oats—vet. there who stagged the trick—no go. Back Locomotive, he's sure to win ; and I'm glad of it, for I hate Jews, and never like to see them in the betting-ring. They're not safe uns to deal with, for they split and never stump up. Solomon ? Well, I dessay he was the best of the lot ; but I never heard the parson say that Solomon had the sense to get up races at Jerusalem."

"You hear that, Davie ?" said I. "Speedwell is here for certain, and must fall into the hands of Pocock."

"I'm no just sae sure about that," replied Osett. "Yon Pocock is a conceited body ; and for a' the brag he makes about his cunning, it wouldna be sae dooms

difficult to cast glamour in his een. And it's no impossible that he may meet wi' his match; for I observed something as we came out of the railway station that makes me think he's been expected here by folk that have nae fancy to shake hands wi' him."

"Why, what did you observe?"

"There was a wee ragged laddie at the outer door, wi' a face as sharp as a darning-needle; and he kept spying at the folk as they came out, just as a herd would do if he thought a strange sheep had got among the hirsell. He didna put himself forward either, but keepit close behind a hurley. Nae sooner did he see Pocock, than he gied a kind o' lauch, which I interpreted to mean—'Aha, billie! you're the chield that I'm looking out for;' and I noticed that he gaed after the blawn-up policeman—for, after a', he's nae better than that—but aye keeping the other side of the causeway, and whiles turning himsel' heels-ower-head, as if he were sair kittled by some funny notion."

"And why did you not mention that sooner?" said I.

"What would have been the use of that?" replied Davie. "Pocock couldna have grippit the laddie for looking at him; and if he had the will, I defy him to have done it, for the callant would hae slipt through his fingers like quicksilver. Besides, you heard the blether he made about carrying out his ain plans; and was it for the like of me to hint that he might be walking on a slide? He as good as said to us that he wanted nae counsel; and I ken weel that it's perfectly useless to nudge a conceited gowk."

“Nevertheless, Davie, you ought to have mentioned the circumstance to me at once. You are aware that I am deeply interested in this business, else we should not have been here to-day ; and when I requested your assistance, I did so in the full assurance that you would help me to the utmost of your power. Whereas, now, at the most critical moment, you—from some whim, or absurd dislike to a man who has been forced upon me as an agent, but in whose sagacity I have no great faith—delay communicating a fact, which, according to your own admission, may defeat the object of our journey, and, I must also add, subject me to the deepest mortification.”

“Not a word mair, Mr Norman — not a word mair !” cried Osett, almost convulsively. “I see I was wrong ; but yon havering creature, Pocock, fairly broke the back of my patience, and I couldna help wishing to see his dowp come down wi’ a thud upon the ice. I’ll atone for it as far as I can. I’ll gang down to the race-course, try to see the body, and warn him that his coming has been observed. Not that I think that will better us ; but my conscience smites me, Mr Norman, that I have been somewhat to blame in this matter ; and I would rather be doukit to death, as the auld witches were, in a quarry-hole, than have it said that I injured you by word or deed.”

“Make haste then, Davie, and tell Pocock not to delay the arrest, if he has any reason to suppose that his person has been recognised.”

Osett having departed, I requested to be shown to

my bedroom, which I found to be nothing more than an exceedingly ill-furnished closet, originally intended as a dressing-room to an adjoining apartment, and communicating with it by a door. Whilst making some slight change in my dress, somewhat disordered by the night journey, I was surprised to hear a low moaning, as if proceeding from some one in bodily pain: then the bell in the next room was rung violently; and there were other sounds indicative of deadly sickness.

“Some unlucky fellow,” thought I, “who has been exceeding over night. It’s little of the races he’ll see, judging from those convulsive efforts. I hope, though, this sort of thing is not going to last, for it is not pleasant to hear a man crowing like a cock, with nothing but a board to divide us.”

The voice of a maid-servant, who had replied to the summons, now caught my ear, and I heard her say something about a doctor. The answer, if any, was inaudible, but the distressing symptoms still continued. Leaving the room, I encountered the girl in the passage.

“That gentleman,” said I, “appears to be very ill. Is it anything more, think you, than a temporary attack for which brandy may bear the blame?”

“Indeed, sir,” replied the girl, “brandy has nothing to do with it. The poor young gentleman has been in a bad way for these three days, and has seen the doctor twice—a very nice old man, but not over bright—who gave him some stuff to take. But it has

done him no good, and I think he is getting worse and worse."

"Is there no one here to look after him?" said I.

"Yes; he has a friend who sometimes comes to see him, but does not put up here. But he's not of much use, for he's a sporting man, and is altogether taken up about horses. Indeed, I wish he would stay away, for the young gentleman seems always worse after his visits. But I must go down stairs and fetch hot water."

"Stay one moment, my girl!" cried I, a horrible suspicion darting across my mind. "This friend—what sort of looking man is he?"

"Lauk, sir!" said the girl, "I don't heed gentlemen much, for I've got my own work to attend to. But the man is remarkable enough, though no way to my liking. He's one of the flash gentry—thick-set, swarthy, and very like a Jew."

"Speedwell, for a thousand!" muttered I.

"That's his name, sure enough!" replied the girl, with a look of surprise. "I wonder how you came to find it out, for I do suppose you are none of his set."

"You are right there, my girl. And now tell me—is not the name of this poor young fellow, Littlewoo?"

"Well! I declare you are a very clever gentleman indeed!" replied the chambermaid, who, like many others of her calling, was not without a touch of coquetry. "How you do find out secrets, to be sure! Littlewoo is his name, at least that is on his port-manteau. La, sir! I hope you're not a conjuror."

“You may rest easy on that score, I assure you. Now go, like a good girl, and fetch the hot water. Poor Littlewoo is an old acquaintance of mine ; and as he seems to have no one to look after him just now, but yourself—and I’m sure you are a kind nurse—I shall take the liberty of stepping into his room, and see if I can be of any service.”

“That’s very good in you, sir. I know’d you were a real gentleman as soon as I saw you,” said the chambermaid.

As Nerissa was becoming rather confidential—I may remark that she was a bouncing black-eyed lass, with cherry cheeks and a roguish smile—I thought it wise to terminate the conversation by a nod, and went straight, without even the ceremony of a knock, into Littlewoo’s bedroom.

I found the poor fellow lying on his back, evidently in a state of great exhaustion ; and I was shocked to observe how emaciated and spent was his appearance. He did not look at me when I entered ; but when I placed my hand, rather through instinct than design, upon his wrist, he muttered feebly—

“Doctor, I’m very much worse—awfully sick. The stuff you sent has done me no good. Sick—sick ! O, dear me, I hope I’m not going to die !” and a shudder passed through his limbs.

“I hope and trust not !” said I, in a tone as soothing as I could assume. “But I am not the doctor. Don’t excite yourself. I am your old friend Norman Sinclair, who, hearing that you were ill, have come to see

you, and stay with you if need be. We'll get you put to rights, my poor fellow—never fear ; only you must keep as quiet as possible for the present."

" Ah ! Norman," said Littlewoo, turning on me his eyes, which, alas, were hollow and showed no lustre, " this is kind—very kind ! You have always been a true friend ; but, woe is me, I have let the devil prevail. Hush ! what noise was that ? Are you sure Speedwell is not listening ? "

" No fear of that," said I. " He has other things to think of. He is down at the course, looking after his horse, entered for the principal race."

" Will his horse win, think you, Norman ? I—put your ear close to me—I hate the man, but I hope his horse may win ; for if it does not—O God ! these convulsions again ! " And the poor fellow shook and writhed so dreadfully, that I can liken it to nothing but direct demoniacal possession.

" Where is the landlord ? " cried I to the girl, who now entered. " Desire him to come here instantly. Mr Littlewoo is worse than I supposed."

" Master has gone down to the races, sir," replied the girl ; " and I don't expect he will come back before evening."

" Most unfortunate ! " I said. " But tell me—is there no other doctor in the town except the old man whom you mentioned as having been here already ? We must have immediate medical assistance."

" Why, yes, sir : there be a young man, a Dr Menelaws ; only he's not in much practice yet, though they

do say he's very clever. He lives just in the next street, and I daresay you'll find him at home, for he's a quiet gentleman and steady like."

"Well, then, you stay here and take care of Mr Littlewoo till I return. But do not allow any one to enter his room."

I had not much trouble in finding the small surgery. The doctor was within; and in him, to my no small surprise and delight, I recognised my old college chum, Willie Menelaws, along with whom I had made my first unfortunate attempts at chemical experiment.

The urgency of the occasion left little space for greeting, and none for those inquiries which friends are so eager to pursue after being separated for years. I explained to Menelaws, as briefly as I could, the state in which I had found Littlewoo, and we hastened back to the Falcon.

The more violent convulsions had passed away, and Littlewoo was now comparatively quiet, but so feeble that he could give no articulate answers to the questions of Menelaws. The latter made a minute inspection, asked to see what medicines had been given, and examined these closely.

"When was Dr Sloman here?" said Menelaws to the girl.

"Last night, sir, just before bed-time. The gentleman had been very sick in the afternoon, but the doctor gave him a draught—that's it in the bottle you have in your hand—and desired me to give him some

of it every hour. I gave him two spoonfuls, and then he seemed relieved and fell asleep."

"Hum!" said Menelaws, putting the mixture to his lips. "Henbane, I think, with a little laudanum, and probably some fluid magnesia. Come—the old gentleman is not in his dotage yet. I don't know that he could have prescribed anything better. Pray, did you hear him say what he thought was the nature of the illness?"

"I think, sir, he said it was bile. Mr Littlewoo's friend was present, and told him about the sickness."

"He called it bile, did he?" said Menelaws. "I fear I must eat in my words: he's but a fool and a fogey after all. And was that the last medicine given to him?"

"It was the last he got from the doctor, sir; but I don't think it was the last he took."

"How was that, my girl? Who gave him anything else?"

"Why, sir, this morning about eight I came into the room, found Mr Littlewoo awake, and asked him how he felt. He said he was much better, and thought he would be able to get up in the course of the day. Just then his friend—that was Mr Speedwell, you know, sir—came in, looking rather flustered like, and asked me to go down and fetch him a glass of bitters from the bar. I somehow took it into my head that he wanted to get me out of the room, for he always spoke cross when I was there; however, I went for the bitters; but before coming into the room

again, hearing Speedwell speaking earnest-like, I—I——”

“ Well?—go on, my girl. I think I know what you were about to say. You stopped to listen—a very natural thing, and quite justifiable under the circumstances.”

“ Yes, sir, that’s just what I did ; for I never could abide that man’s face, and I heard him say—‘ Nonsense, my good fellow—you must take the pills. It’s Sloman’s orders. He’d have been here himself, but he has been called away to the country.’ ”

“ And what followed ? ”

“ Mr Littlewoo said something that I did not hear, but the other persisted, and I suppose the pills were swallowed, for I heard the young gentleman ask for a mouthful of water. Then I went into the room, and gave Speedwell the bitters, which he tossed off, but his hand was shaking very much. Shortly afterwards he went away, and I went to my work in the other rooms. Presently I heard a loud scream like, and, running in, found Mr Littlewoo all drawn up, beating the bed with his hands, and looking very wild. That lasted for a good while, and then he became mortal sick.”

“ Show me the pill-box,” said Menelaws.

“ I don’t think there was a box, sir—at least I saw none in the room after Mr Speedwell left.”

“ Well, my good girl, I am much obliged for your information. Pray remain here till I speak a word or two with Mr Sinclair. You have a room here ? ”

“ Yes,” said I : “ the next to this.”

“ And what think you of the case ? ” I said, as soon as we were alone.

Menelaws looked very grave.

“ To say the truth, Sinclair, I am not very willing, without knowing somewhat more about the parties, to tell you what I think. Who and what is this Mr Speedwell ? ”

“ I can give you his character in a few words. He is a consummate and unscrupulous villain.”

“ And this poor young fellow—whom, by the way, I remember well enough, for I have seen him going about Edinburgh—how comes he in such company ? ”

“ He has been duped and made a tool of by a sharper, Willie.”

“ Do you know of any object that could be served by having him put out of the way ? ”

“ I believe there is such an object, and that Speedwell desires to get rid of him.”

“ Then, between you and me, my firm conviction is that his life has been tampered with. There is no natural cause to which I can attribute those convulsions. The symptoms indicate that he has taken poison.”

“ Good heavens ! And do you think he will die of it ? ”

“ No. The vomiting has saved him. Though he is miserably emaciated, his constitution is still strong enough to throw off the poison ; but a very little more would have finished him.”

“The thing seems hardly credible! yet I doubt not you are right. What do you think has been given to him?”

“I should say strychnine. The previous illness which old Sloman mistook for a fit of bile, but which was clearly nothing of the kind, was probably the effect of some other drug. The sedative draught relieved him; but this new attack is quite of another character.”

“Then what is to be done?”

“If you mean with regard to that poor fellow, the best thing is to leave him quiet for a little—time enough for medicine an hour or two hence. There is no greater mistake than to precipitate remedies, when nature has begun to operate its own relief. But here is something amounting, in my judgment, to a deliberate attempt at murder, and it is my duty to make the authorities aware of that. My only doubt is, whether I should not first see old Sloman, and try to find out whether he really sent any pills, and what was their composition. But he is a pompous superannuated blockhead, who honours me with his hatred because he considers me a rival; and the chances are that he would fly into a passion on learning that I had been called in, and positively decline to give any information.”

“But, Menelaws, do you consider that there is sufficient proof to entitle you to apply to a magistrate?”

“No doubt that is a serious difficulty. We can't, you see, have a *post mortem*; and as there are no

materials for chemical analysis, I might get into an ugly scrape. But then, are we warranted in allowing this scoundrel to have further access to the patient?"

"That, I think, can be prevented. You must know that a criminal officer is at this moment in search of him, with a warrant to apprehend him on another charge; and it is very unlikely that he can escape. But if he should return and renew his attempt, there are means of baffling him. This door communicates with Littlewoo's apartment. Fortunately the key is in the lock, and there is no other kind of fastening; so, by maintaining a watch here, we can instantly come to the rescue."

"A capital notion! But who is to bell the cat? The Jew will show fight; for most of them are practised pugilists, and can hit out like Aby Belasco. You must contrive to find some assistance, for I can't stay here with you all day."

"O, as to that I am well provided. I have a friend here, a strong fellow, on whom I can depend; and one or other of us will occupy this room, and be on the alert. So, till we have further news of Speedwell, you need take no further steps."

"I daresay that is the wisest plan. But, Sinclair, when am I to have a talk with you about old times? Ah me, man! I have often laughed heartily at thinking over the fun we used to have at college in our daft days, though since then I have had sorrow and misfortune enough to weigh me down. Can you not come with me to the surgery?"

“ Impossible, my dear Willie ! I am on duty now as a sentinel.”

“ Ah, true ! But you won't leave Torcaster without giving me an evening ? It is so seldom that I chance now to meet with an early friend.”

“ Be sure that I will not, unless necessity compels me. But now, take another look at your patient, and bring the medicine with you when you return. By that time I trust we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that the villain is in the hands of justice.”

CHAPTER .IX.

THE RUNNING FOR THE QUEEN'S PLATE.

MORE than three hours had elapsed, during which time Littlewoo had fallen into a slumber, and yet there was no appearance of Davie Osett. I fretted somewhat at this, both because it was irksome to be cooped in a close room without even the solace of a book, and because I could not help being apprehensive that our plan might possibly have miscarried. Osett had promised to return so soon as he could communicate with Pocock; and that functionary, albeit gifted with a most unexpressive countenance, was too portly in figure to claim the privilege of fern-seed and walk invisibly. No doubt, in such a crowd it might be difficult to find him, or he might be lying in watch and keeping himself purposely concealed—in short, a whole host of “might be’s” swarmed up, like hornets, to torment me, and grievously did they disturb my equanimity.

At length I heard a footstep in the passage, which my sharpened ear immediately recognised as the tread

of Osett ; and the surveyor entered, out of breath, and in a state of heat that would have sent up the thermometer, had there been such an instrument in the room.

“Hech, but it’s awful hot !” ejaculated Davie, as he threw himself into a chair. “Let me ring the bell, Mr Norman, for something to drink, for I’m just perishing wi’ thirst !”

“Order what you please, Davie, only don’t keep me in suspense. Have you seen Pocock ?”

“I looked east, and I looked west—I gaed through tent, and booth, and stance, and even into the betting-ring, but not a glimpse of the creature could I get anywhere. I wot it’s been a sair search to me ; for the silver watch that I won at a raffle in Selkirk, seven year syne, has disappeared from my pouch as clean as you could knock the head off a syboe. Lass, bring me a jug of the very smallest ale !”

“That is most unfortunate !” I said. “What—no trace of him whatever ?”

“Nae mair than if he had been melted down for candles—though it’s like, if that were to be done, they would e’en gae out wi’ a sputter. But lordsake, Mr Norman, what needs ye take on sae about that man ? He’s auld enough to look after himself ; and he never would thank you if he heard that you had sent me after him, like a nurse to take heed that the bairn disna tumble into the water. But here’s something better than water ; and it comes in gude time, for my throat is as dry as a cinder.”

“I wish, Osett,” said I, “you would be more serious. Since you left this house, circumstances have transpired which render this unaccountable absence of Pocock doubly hazardous.”

“Dear me! Mr Norman,” replied Davie, “you’re no just yoursel’ the day. Serious? I was never mair serious in my life! A man that has lost his watch is not apt to be in a joking humour. And, mind ye, this Pocock’s what they call a detective. It’s no his business to show himsel’, and gang majoring about like a serjeant enlisting recruits. I dinna think him clever; but I’ve a better opinion of him now than I had in the morning, just because I could find him nowhere. But what new thing is this that you speak of?”

I could not help seeing that Osett, in the main, was right, and that my anxiety or impatience—excusable, I venture to think under the circumstances—had made me somewhat unreasonable. I now told my foster-brother, in as few words as possible, what had taken place since he left me.

All over the habitable globe there are zones appointed by Providence for the production of food and the making of beverages suitable for the inhabitants of the climate; and in like manner do the passions of the people vary; for that which in one country is deemed a venial offence, or at least so common as to excite no thrill of horror, is in another regarded as a most hideous atrocity. In Scotland, open assaults, though rare, are judged perhaps too leniently, but a case of poisoning excites a degree of horror which a native of Italy

probably could not comprehend. As I spoke, the veins swelled on Davie's forehead.

"The villain!" he said—"the infernal scoundrelly villain! I'd be content, for ance, to take the office of hangman to have the pleasure of sending such an unredeemed blackguard out of the world! Na! that beats anything I ever heard o'! To make away in sic a fearsome manner wi' the puir lad that he has brought to ruin, and fling him, without an hour's warning, headlong into the pit of perdition—it's a thing that the muckle deil himsel' would hardly hae the heart to do! And then, to think that he could gang down to the races, and bet, and drink, and swear, kenning a' the while that the unfortunate creature he had seduced and plundered and poisoned was screeching in the agonies o' death! It's no the ordinary Tophet that will be made hot for sic a ruthless sinner!"

"Did you hear anything about the probabilities of his winning the race?" I inquired.

"It had not come off when I was down at the course," replied Osett; "but it's looked upon as the grand event of the day, and the folk were betting thick for and against Hippodrome. There are as many Jews yonder as you'd expect to see at the skailing of a synagogue, and they're a' keen for their Barabbas."

"The chances, then, are that he will not return till late. Before that time we ought to hear of Pocock; but I have committed a sad mistake in not directing him to make the arrest at the earliest possible moment.

You may depend upon it that Speedwell, if still at liberty, will be here to-night, and force his way into Littlewoo's room. Such a miscreant as he is will not leave the work half done, and a foul murder may be committed if we are not here to prevent it."

"Manslaughter there may be, but not murder," quoth Davie ; "for if he offers but as much as to lay a finger on the puir lad, I'll thraw his neck with as little compunction as I would that of a hoodie-craw !"

"It is a fortunate circumstance," I continued, "that what he may do can hardly escape our observation ; and more fortunate still that, through this door, we can pounce upon him at any moment. It is not likely that he will attempt anything during the day ; still I wish you to stay here, and receive Dr Menelaws. I shall go for an hour or two to the course, and possibly may fall in with Pocock."

Just as I reached the course, the bell rang preparatory to the start ; and there was an immediate commotion and crush among the people, who eagerly crowded to the rails. By paying a few shillings, I obtained a place on a stand, which gave me a full view of the scene, and it certainly was a very striking one. On the curving line of broad green turf, walled on either side by a living throng, some eight or ten noble animals were displayed : some urged into a gallop by their riders, as if to abate a little of their super-abundant mettle ; others pacing leisurely towards the starting-post, husbanding the strength to be presently put forth to the uttermost.

“Can you tell me which race this is?” I asked of a bystander, who appeared to be somewhat less under the influence of excitement than most of those around me.

“The Queen’s Plate—the great race of the day,” he replied. “Do you not know the horses, sir? That black horse just going by, ridden by the man in the crimson jacket, is Mr Truck’s Locomotive. That’s the horse I’d lay my money on if I was a betting man. Black and green is Lord Darlingford’s mare, Messalina. She was rather a favourite a week ago, but has since gone down on the list. And that, with the blue and white colours, is Speedwell’s Hippodrome: he’s said to be a very good horse too. The others, it is thought, have little chance.”

And now they are ranged in line—the bell rings—the signal is given—and on they come, sweeping like a whirlwind through the throng of eager and gesticulating spectators. So close are they together that the colours are massed as in the field of a kaleidoscope. You cannot tell which is first; nor does that matter now, for ere long the squadron will be broken, and superior strength and speed will assume their proper place. An inequality in the intervening ground conceals them for a little from the view; but now they emerge—Hippodrome leading, the mare a length or two behind, then two other horses, then Locomotive, the remainder dropping behind. “That ish beautiful!” shouts a hideous Hebrew by my side. “I alwaysh said Mishter Speedwell was sure to win!” And he

thrust his hand into the breeches pocket, as if counting the anticipated shekels.

Now they approach the turn of the course. Still no change in the relative position of the leaders; but Locomotive has crept into the third place. "I'll lay a hundred to shixty on Hippodrome!" bawls the Hebrew. "Done with you, Mr Moss!" says the quiet-looking man who gave me the information about the horses; and he makes a note of the transaction in his tablets.

But here they come, still at a distance, but, as it were, right towards us, men and horses bulking larger at every stride. Messalina is behind—yes, clearly behind; no chance of her winning now—and Hippodrome and Locomotive are running neck to neck.

"Hippodrome has it yet!"—"No, it's Locomotive!" And there is a regular roar among the multitude. Now they are at the distance-post. The rider in the blue and white lashes furiously with his whip—the other only touches his horse with the spur. And it is enough. The mighty stride seems to lengthen out. Locomotive shoots forward like an arrow from the Parthian bow; and a tremendous cheer proclaims his victory! "O vat a terrible dishaster dish ish!" groans the Hebrew, whose countenance has assumed the hue of a decayed orange. "Sh'help me Moses, I've lost a thoushand poundsh!"

"So!" thought I, as I descended from the stand, "it's all up with Speedwell. But what could poor Littlewoo mean when he said that he hoped his horse might win? Can he have fathomed the depth of this

scoundrel's villany, and become aware that his own life depended upon an issue so precarious? Yet why should Speedwell have made this diabolical attempt if he expected that the success of his horse would relieve him of his present difficulties? That's an enigma. Can it be that, with fiendish calculation, he has so tempered the dose as to bring his wretched dupe to the very gates of death, without absolutely thrusting him in whilst a chance remained in his favour? The insurance! Ay—if such a thing does really exist, that would explain the mystery. The more need for watchfulness just now!”

It was in vain to look for Pocock amidst the hubbub which now prevailed, and I resolved to return to the town. As I wended my way thither, a man pushed past me in excited haste. I caught a glimpse of his countenance. It was Speedwell; and the expression of his face was that of a demon! He saw me not; indeed, I doubt whether he saw anything—but he pressed on, and I kept him in view, until he turned abruptly into a small public-house, and disappeared. I looked back with some curiosity to see if Pocock might not be on his track, but there was no appearance of that vigilant officer. Nevertheless there was a watch upon Speedwell, as he knew in his guilty conscience; for close behind him trod the Avenger of Blood—the presence felt but unseen—as He has followed every murderer on earth, since Cain first raised his hand against his brother!

CHAPTER X.

MURDER WILL OUT.

LITTLEWOO, I was informed, had expressed a most anxious wish to see me ; and as Menelaws reported that he was decidedly better, though still very nervous, I went at once to his apartment. He was sitting up in bed, propped by pillows, and extended to me a clammy hand.

“ It is you, Sinclair—God be praised ! I was afraid you had gone away altogether. Promise that you won’t leave me ! It is a terrible thing to lie here alone, thinking of the past ; but I could bear that, if I were sure that *he* would not come again to scare me out of my senses. I was asleep just now, and had such a horrible dream. I thought he stood at the bedside and told me I must die, for he knew I intended to betray him. I tried to cry for mercy, but I could not utter a word ; and then he clutched me by the throat, and my eyes became full of blood, and I heard awful sounds like the rushing of flames and the howlings of the damned ! ”

“Be calm, my poor friend! No one shall hurt you. Is it Speedwell you mean?”

“Ay—who else? Speedwell who led me into folly—Speedwell who tempted me to crime—Speedwell who has made me a rogue and a beggar, and who is now driving me to perdition! O Norman, you do not know, you cannot know, what a fiend incarnate he is!”

“I know that he is a very wicked fellow,” I replied, “and that he has acted a villain’s part towards you. But why do you fear him so much?”

“Because—because, Norman—I feel—I am sure—that he is trying to poison me!”

“Now, collect yourself, James, and do not be afraid to speak out; you are under my protection now. What grounds have you for thinking that?”

“I’ll tell you, Norman, as well as I can. You must know that before he brought me down to this place he contrived to get from me all the money I could raise—some of it, Heaven help me! was not my own—and when he found that I had no more, he tried to persuade me to forge my father’s signature to a bill for a thousand pounds, which he said he could easily get discounted, because the old man would certainly retire it rather than suffer his only son to be convicted as a felon! I know that I am a reprobate, Norman, and that I have done some very bad things, but I was not so far lost as to consent to that. I told him I would rather rot in a jail than do what he proposed.”

“My poor James! there is hope for you yet. And what said he to that?”

“He replied with a sneer—it makes my blood curdle to remember it, for it was more like the snarl of a wolf—that if I wished to go into jails, I had ample choice. My creditors would provide me with one, and he could lodge me in another from which I could only pass into the criminal dock! It’s no use making concealments now—the monster had me utterly in his power. But I remained quite firm. It seems to me wonderful that I did so, considering how deeply I had sinned already; but you, Norman, were the means of saving me.”

“I, my dear James? you must be labouring under some strange delusion.”

“Not at all. You may have forgotten it; but when you first called on me in London, you warned me against Speedwell; and when I told you what was my real intention then—that I would shun his company—you bade me not trust to my own strength, but pray for power to resist temptation. O that your words had impressed me earlier! But, when this devil in a human shape prompted me to a deed of villany that would have broken the heart of my kind old confiding father, what you then said flashed across my memory; and, for the first time, I offered up a prayer to God to help me. And it was answered on the instant. All the terrors of the rack would not have made me commit so detestable a crime.”

“And was he incensed at your refusal?”

“Dreadfully. He ground his teeth, swore that I should have cause to repent my obstinacy, and went

away. When he returned he seemed to be in a better humour, talked to me as if there had been no disagreement between us, and proposed that we should come down here, as it was not safe for me to remain in London. That was true enough ; for I had debts, and there were other matters which I feared might be brought up against me. Here he had a number of acquaintances, sporting men like himself, and for a few days I was kept in a regular whirl of dissipation. One night, when we were alone, seeing that I had drunk too much, he renewed the proposal about the forgery, but I was still resolute. ‘O, well,’ said he, ‘my fine fellow, I see you are becoming too holy for me altogether. Since you won’t make yourself useful, there’s nothing for it but breaking up the connection, for I can’t go on paying your shot for ever. But we needn’t talk about that till the races are over. In the mean time, to show you I bear no malice, let us have one more glass of brandy-and-water.’ Norman ! I am as certain as I am of my own existence that some poisonous drug was put into the liquor, for I no sooner swallowed it than I felt a burning sensation in my throat, and presently became very sick. Speedwell affected great concern, got me to bed, and next day fetched an old doctor, who made light of my illness, saying that such things would happen when young men lived too freely. But I know, Norman, that my illness was not caused by that ; for, the day after, I saw Speedwell with my own eyes pour something from a phial into a cup of broth that had been sent to me ; and when I

declined taking it, alleging that I was too sick to swallow anything, his face grew as dark as midnight, and, with a muttered curse, he threw the broth out of the window. And that is not all ; for, last night, he forced me to take a couple of pills, after which I was seized with those frightful convulsions.”

“ Now, tell me, Littlewoo, and tell me candidly,” said I ; “ has this fellow any interest in your life ? ”

“ Not in my life, Norman ; but he has an interest in my death ! You have divined the cause of my terror. For the last three days that thought has haunted me ; and when I hear the step of Speedwell in the passage, it sounds to me like the tread of a murderer. He holds a policy of insurance on my life to the amount of two thousand pounds ; and if his horse fails to win this race—O, Norman, can you tell me how it has gone ? ”

“ Don’t agitate yourself, Littlewoo. My life for yours, in so far as this scoundrel is concerned ! Hippodrome was not the winner.”

“ Then he’ll try to murder me, Norman—do you hear ?—he’ll try to murder me ! I know that he is hard pressed, and has nothing else to look to. O, dear Norman, won’t you save me ? ”

“ Yes, James, I will ; but you must collect your senses, and not give way to unnecessary terror. Listen to me. If your suspicions are well founded—and I think they are—Speedwell will be here to-night. Nay, don’t be alarmed ! I shall be in the next room with two friends ; and if he proceeds to threaten you or to

offer any violence, we shall rush in through that door, which is unfastened, and secure him. But you must not let him see that you suspect him, or cry out for assistance before you are menaced, otherwise we can do nothing, and you will still remain exposed to his attempts. Do you thoroughly understand me?"

"Yes, Norman, I think I do; and I shall try to restrain myself. But you won't fail to be at hand?"

"Be assured of that. I shall not leave that room to-night except to enter yours."

I had engaged Menelaws to join our watching party, in order that, should Speedwell again attempt to administer any of his infernal drugs, they might be placed in the hands of a competent scientific witness. Our arrangements were quite simple—we had merely to keep quiet, and leave the door of communication slightly ajar, taking care that there no light should enter. As for weapons, we required none. We had not long to wait. About nine o'clock a footstep was heard approaching. I instantly extinguished the candle, and some one entered Littlewoo's apartment.

"How are you to-night?" said Speedwell, whose voice I recognised. "Better, I hope, for we must be out of this place early to-morrow. It's all up with me! That brute of a horse came in second—I suppose the infernal rascal I employed to ride him was bribed—so there's an end of the stakes, bets, and all! I can't show to settle, for I haven't a stiver—so this is my last venture on the turf."

"I am very sorry," said Littlewoo.

“O, confound you and your sorrow ! Don’t lie snivelling there, but sit up and listen to me. It’s all d—d nonsense and humbug to tell me that you are ill. Sloman says there’s nothing the matter with you, only that you have been lushing too freely. I’ve just seen him, and he thinks you will be quite able to travel to-morrow, after taking a couple of opium pills that he has made up. Get a sound sleep, and you’ll be all right.”

“I can’t leave this to-morrow, Speedwell—I can’t indeed ! I am so weak and faint.”

“Don’t try to come over me with your gammon, idiot !” replied Speedwell. “Confound you ! You were as strong as a rhinoceros when you came here, and would have been so still, only that you can’t see a brandy-bottle without making a beast of yourself. You’ve a touch of the horrors on you, but the opium will put that to rights. So swallow these, and be done with it.”

“No, I won’t take them, Speedwell. The last you gave me made me much worse.”

“But I tell you you shall take them !” said the other. “Listen to me ! I must be off to-morrow, else I’m done for. If I leave you here, what is to become of you ? You haven’t enough money even to pay your bill ; and how are you to make good the bets you have lost upon Hippodrome ? There’s nothing for it but to cut and run. And how do I know but that this is a dodge of yours to give me the slip ? You have too many secrets of mine in your keeping for me to part

with you just yet. Safe's the word with Sam Speedwell ! You think yourself mighty cunning, but you don't get the better of me, my lad ! Ill or well, you go with me to-morrow—so make no more words about it."

"If you insist upon it, Speedwell, I suppose I must—at any rate, I'll try. But leave me now. If I can get a good night's rest, perhaps I shall be stronger in the morning."

"Come, that shows some sense ! You are not a bad fellow after all, Littlewoo ; only you should not be so confoundedly obstinate—it provokes one. Here—take the pills, and I warrant you will sleep sound."

"No—I can sleep well enough without that."

"Bah, man ! Don't trifle with me. Do you pretend to know better than the doctor ? Take them, I say."

"Once and for all, I tell you that I won't do it, Speedwell ; and I desire that you will leave my room !"

"Heyday ! So you are going to rebel, are you ? My fine fellow, I'll soon let you know which of us is the master. Don't you wake the devil within me, for I can tell you he's stirring already ! Do as I bid you, or——"

"Or what, Speedwell ? Would you venture to use violence ?"

"You hell's baby ! If you don't take them quietly I'll thrust them down your throat, though I should have to wrench your teeth open with my knife !"

It needed not the cry for help from Littlewoo to summon us into action. We dashed open the door,

rushed into the room, and Osett and I simultaneously grappled with the Jew. Well was it for us that he had no lethal weapon in his hand ; for he instantly comprehended his peril, and, though taken unawares, fought with the ferocity of a tiger-cat, displaying a muscular strength which certainly would have prevailed had I been the only assailant. But Davie was an expert wrestler, and had closed with him so suddenly that, had Speedwell been possessed of the fistic science of Dutch Sam or Mendoza, he had no room to plant a blow. The struggle did not last more than a minute, for a back-trip prostrated the Jew, and Davie held him down with the grasp of a giant.

“Lie ye there, my man !” said Osett. “Now if ye offer to stir, I’ll gie you a mark that you’ll carry to the gallows ! What ? you’d bite, wad ye, you brute ? Mr Norman, clap a spoon across his mouth, and gie a towel a turn round his head ! That will settle him till we can get a rope. My certie, he’s sure o’ ane some day ! Lie quiet, will you, you dour deevil !—I’m laith to knock the life out of him, if I can help it.”

By this time the sound of the scuffle had alarmed the inmates of the house, and the landlord and others appeared. Menelaws, who was personally known to them, desired a constable to be summoned immediately ; and, seeing that further resistance was of no use, Speedwell gave in, and ceased to struggle. I observed, however, that he put his hand into his waistcoat-pocket as if to withdraw something ; and it was not without using extreme force that we wrenched it open, and

found in the palm what had been the pills, now crushed into a shapeless mass. I made the landlord and another witness specially mark what we had discovered, and the substance was then put into a box and sealed up for future analysis.

All this while Speedwell had never uttered a word ; but now he addressed himself to Churton, the landlord.

“There will be a heavy reckoning for this outrage !” he said. “Are you, Mr Churton, ready to take the responsibility ? It has occurred in your house, and, as you are present, I hold you liable. You know me for a gentleman of means—owner of one of the best horses that ever ran at Torcaster—and hand in glove with every nobleman on the turf. I come here to visit a sick acquaintance whom I find to be delirious ; and I am suddenly assaulted by a Scotch savage and his confederates, and knocked down. D—n them ! they know that I could serve them out, if they had the pluck to come on one by one, the cowardly scoundrels ! Will you, who are an Englishman, and therefore should be a lover of fair play, permit this ?”

“Whoy, I doan’t know, Measter Speedwell,” replied Churton. “Sure enough I’ve seen thee afore ; but, as for character, that’s neither here nor there. It’s spiggot law that he what pays for his beer is an honest man ; but as thee doan’t put up here, nor trouble my tap, I can say nothing one way or other. If it were just a stand-up fight, I might know what to do ; but it’s a constable’s matter now, and I wash my hands on’t.”

“Then what’s the charge against me ? Why am I

detained ? By G—, things have come to a pretty pass, if, in a free country, a gentleman is to be laid in limbo because he has been trepanned by a lousy Scot, whom he could have settled in five minutes, if the fellow had the manliness to stand up for a fair fight ! What have I done ? I tell you, Churton, this is a serious matter, and may be your ruin ; for, as sure as you stand there, I'll bring an action against you at the next assizes. Ask even that poor pitiful devil in the bed there, who is labouring under *delirium tremens*, and sees no end of rats and snakes—he won't tell you that I laid a finger on him. He DARE not ! ”

Speedwell overshot his mark. The last words, though most emphatically uttered, and intended to convey to his victim a significance different from that intelligible to the others present, entirely failed. Littlewoo raised himself in the bed, and spoke thus with a calm and distinct utterance, that contrasted strangely with the vehement ravings of the other :—

“ That man has dared me to tell the truth, and tell it I will, whatever the consequences may be. Let all present listen to my words, and mark them ; for Heaven is my witness that they are true ! Would you know why I am now lying on a bed of sickness and pain, crushed and tortured like a worm that has been trodden under foot ? It is because poison has been administered to me by that cruel wretch, calling himself my friend, who came hither this evening to put an end to a life made miserable through his accursed instigations ! ”

“Liar !” roared Speedwell—“drivelling doting liar ! But I am a fool to bandy words with such a sot ! Once for all I ask you, Churton, will you suffer such an outrage to be committed in your house ? Speak out, if you have the pluck of an Englishman.”

“And once for all I say, measter,” replied Churton, “that I know nowt o’ the business, and wash my hands on’t. But here be the constable—best speak to him.”

“But Speedwell, being probably aware that his eloquence would be utterly thrown away upon the provincial Dogberry, abstained from any further pleading, and was marched off to the station-house, therein to be detained for examination before a magistrate on the following morning.

The doctor having ministered to Littlewoo, whose nerves had been sadly shaken by the foregoing scene, we retired to my room for a little refreshment, of which we stood very much in need. I congratulated Osett on the prowess he had displayed.

“It wasna muckle to brag o’,” replied Davie, modestly, “for I kenned weel enough that if we ance came to grips I could fling him. There’s no many that can stand the auld Border back-trip. Haith ! he’s a strang deevil, though ; and he would have given that body Pocock an awful kemping if they had yoked thegither. I should hae liked weel to have seen that sicht. It wad hae been grand fun.”

“But what on earth can have become of Pocock ?” said I. “His disappearance is an utter mystery. One thing alone seems clear, that he has never been on the

track of Speedwell, else the scoundrel would not have been here. I wish, though, we had him back ; for the warrant in his possession might save us from a great deal of perplexity and trouble which, I foresee, may arise out of this horrid attempt at poisoning."

"It is a very nasty affair," said Menelaws. "The evidence against Speedwell, so far as I can see, is scanty to found a criminal prosecution. Yet it would be a great pity if such a monster should escape."

"I think it highly improbable," said I, "that he will escape conviction on the charge of forgery, in which case the sentence will no doubt be a severe one. But we really cannot do without Pocock. Do you think, Osett, that it would be of any use to make inquiry about him at the police station?"

Scarcely had I uttered these words, when the door flew open, and the individual in question rolled into the apartment. We all stood aghast at the apparition. Not Hector's ghost when it appeared to Eneas on the night of the conflagration of Troy——. But the adventures of Mr Pocock deserve to be recorded in a separate chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

MR POCOCK IS INTRODUCED TO REBECCA.

IF, gentle reader, you ever chanced to witness a steeple-chase over a well-watered and somewhat difficult country, you may have seen, emerging from the brook into which he has been pitched head foremost, some unfortunate rider, whose once gay attire, now bedaubed with mud and slime, suggests the ludicrous comparison of a garden-wasp crawling out of a bottle of the stalest beer. In no less sorry a plight was Mr Pocock, who looked as if he had been attempting to capture a Will-of-the-wisp, and been led by the nimble fugitive through pool, morass, and fen. From head to foot he was thoroughly bemired; and his usually rubicund countenance had assumed a ghastly hue, which hardly could be the result of mere bodily fatigue. Before uttering a word, he seized a glass, mixed for himself a large allowance of brandy-and-water, which he swallowed without drawing breath, and then sank into a chair with a dolorous groan, like the last sigh of an expiring walrus.

The surveyor was the first to break the silence.

“Gudesake, Mr Pocock!” he said, “what’s this o’t? What kind o’ wark hae ye been after this day? I’se wager, now, ye had a tulzie wi’ a wheen vagabonds, and brocht them to jail as cannily as a Hielander drives a herd o’ nowt to the market. O man, but ye’re ower bauld and venturesome! Ye should consider that a precious life like yours is no to be thrown away like a stoup o’ dirty water.”

“What’s duty, is duty,” answered Pocock. “I never was known to shirk it. I always do what I can do; but there is such a thing as odds, and that no man can strive against. Worn’t there a place that was called Fountain blue?”

“You mean, perhaps, Fontainebleau?” said I.

“In course I do,” replied Pocock. “That’s what I said — Fountain blue. It was there that Bonaparte kissed the eagle, which was a graceful way of saying that he had to give in, because he could show fight no longer. He know’d he was done for then, and he didn’t scruple to say it. Torcaster’s my Fountain blue. I’ve been done for! It’s a painful thing for a man at the head of his profession to allow it, but I’ve been regularly done for! ‘What’s the use o’ pride?’ as I once heard the Newgate ordinary say to a cracksman that was boastful of his doings—‘what’s the use o’ pride? It makes a man hold his head so high that he doesn’t see the ditch before him.’ That’s gospel truth; but I didn’t think the day would come when I would have to take them observations as applicable to a gen-

tleman of my calling, let alone experience. But," continued Mr Pocock, again replenishing his glass, "the very sharpest may be taken in; and so I kiss the eagle. As for ditches, I've had enough of them this blessed night to serve me to my dying day."

It cost me some trouble to extort from Mr Pocock the particulars of his adventure; for his recent discomfiture had rendered him somewhat morose, and he continued to harp with distressing monotony on the parallel between his case and that of the Emperor of the French, evidently suggested by some previous contemplation of an engraving after Horace Vernet, which was then popular in the printshops. At length, however, I succeeded in getting out the story, which I shall take the liberty of recounting, partly in my own language, so as to curtail the Pocockian circumlocutions.

It appeared that our excellent detective, shortly after leaving the railway station, became aware that he was followed by the imp whose gambols Osett had remarked. Although conceited, Mr Pocock really was a sharp and quicksighted man, accustomed, like all of his craft, to draw conclusions from circumstances which would have appeared trivial to others; and he instantly conceived the idea that the urchin had been sent after him as a spy. His first impulse was to accost the boy—his second, to take no notice of him until he should fall in with one of the Torcaster police, to whose custody he might consign this modern Flibbertigibbet; but his perplexity was soon ended, for the boy, after throwing a few additional somersets, gradually drew near, and,

peering curiously into his face, inquired if he wasn't Mr P. from London ; for if he was, Jem Anderton wanted to speak with him.

Now this Jem Anderton was, according to Pocock, a character of considerable renown among the fraternity of the police. He had once been on the detective force, but had been dismissed under strong suspicion of having taken a large bribe from a brace of swindlers whom the authorities were most anxious to secure. No direct proof could indeed be brought against him ; but he was sacrificed for the same reason that Cæsar assigned when he divorced his wife, for it is a wholesome rule of the force that its members must be above suspicion. He had shifted his abode from London to the north of England, where, being an enterprising man, he had opened several public-houses in different localities ; and, moreover, he still maintained a correspondence, though strictly private, with a few of his old comrades, to whom he was occasionally able to give some valuable information.

All this was well known to Pocock, who had in fact suggested to one of his subordinates the propriety of writing to Anderton to inquire about Speedwell, in the event of their obtaining no trace of him in the metropolis ; so that the message delivered by the boy did not take him altogether by surprise. It did certainly strike him as curious how Anderton should have divined that he was to be in Torcaster that morning ; but those connected with the police have strange modes of ascertaining the movements of the brotherhood, and it was,

on the whole, more probable that Jem Anderton might be expecting him, than that Speedwell should have taken the alarm. Pocock, therefore, without any misgiving, accepted the guidance of the lad, from whom he could extract nothing more than the message previously delivered.

The boy did not enter the town, but followed a path leading to the remoter part of the race-course, where he said Anderton was to be in waiting. No Anderton appeared; but in lieu of him a respectable-looking man, who had been lying on the turf, rose up, and, touching his hat, inquired—

“Be you Mr Pocock, sir?”

On receiving an answer in the affirmative, he stated that Anderton had been compelled, for special reasons, to go that morning a short distance into the country; but that he had desired him to be in waiting at that place, with a horse and gig, in case Mr Pocock should appear, as he was wanted particularly on a matter of the utmost moment.

“I wasn’t quite sure about the man,” said Pocock, “for he was one of that oily-speaking sort that I consider to be somewhat slippery. Whenever I see a chap with a face as broad as the moon, who shows his teeth, and makes on as if he liked you, I always suspect roguery—if he puts out both his hands to you, sure for certain he intends to take you in. Of course, this here cove durstn’t take that liberty with me; but I didn’t like his eye—it was a thought too quick and jerky. So I asked him if Jem Anderton had not given

him a token, which I may tell you, master, is a way we have in the force. ‘Why,’ says he, ‘I doesn’t know about tokens, but Measter Anderton told to me to ask, if you had asked any questions about him, whether you would fetch or carry.’ ‘All right!’ said I; ‘so, my good man, let’s be off without further delay.’”

“Really, Mr Pocock,” I said, “you excite my curiosity. May I inquire what mystic meaning those few words conveyed?”

“Well; it’s an old story now, though by no means a bad un. When I was a young hand, just beginning business, I was sent down in plain clothes to the Epsom races, where we know’d that the light-fingered gentry would be at work; and our superintendent—the same old gentleman I told you about, who was a second father to me—gave me no end of directions. In those days men wore either Hessian boots, or pumps and stockings; and when I came into the ring, where I thought most of my birds would be busy, I sees the queer-looking chaps—for I didn’t know them then by head-mark—mostly in pumps. But what took my fancy especially was this—that I observed, just under the pump-tie of the right foot, in more than a dozen of them, a clover leaf, which, says I to myself, can’t be there by accident, but must have a meaning, which meaning it’s my business to find out. So, as I was in pumps myself, I gets a clover leaf, and sticks it in. Presently, in the middle of a race, I feels a pinch on the arm, and I hears a whisper—‘Fetch or

carry?’ ‘Carry,’ says I; and something slid into my pocket. Next minute I heard the same—‘Carry,’ says I again, and I bagged another weight. Before that race was done I had five jolly pocket-books, containing no end of notes, to deliver at the station-house; and the detection of that ’ere dodge by a young hand was allowed to be as clever a thing as was known in the records of the profession. Of course no song was made about it; but as a token from Jem Anderton, who was by no means the worst officer I ever know’d, it was convincing; so I concluded that all was right, and got into the gig.”

Pocock then narrated how he had been driven for a distance of at least three miles, over side-ways and rough unfrequented roads, to a solitary old house, which might at one time have served for a store, situated on the bank of a canal. There he was received by a buxom wench, with arms as muscular as a prize-fighter’s, who informed him that a friend was waiting for him in an upper chamber; so, after climbing several flights of crazy wooden stairs, he was ushered into a room, tenanted only by a corpulent elderly female in green spectacles. This wise woman, who might have passed for the Witch of Endor, was immersed in the study of a book that might have been either a copy of Hervey’s *Meditations* or a volume of the *Newgate Calendar*; and so intent was she on her literary toil that she did not even look up to greet the detective officer.

“I ask your pardon, ma’am,” said Pocock, “but I

suspect there's some mistake here. I was sent for to see Jem Anderton."

"No mistake by no manner of means," replied the old lady, laying down the book, and favouring her visitor with a gracious nod—"that is, if you are Mr Pocock; for I'm Jem Anderton's mamma, and commonly does business for him when he happens to be out of the way, which, I'm sorry to say, he is just at present. So sit you down, Mr Pocock, and let's have a cosy chat together. Dear-a-me, it's a long time surely since you've been down in these parts! And how is Mrs Pocock, and all the little Pococks?"

"I didn't come here to chatter, ma'am," said Pocock, somewhat incensed. "I've lost too much precious time already. Where's Jem Anderton? and what does he want with me?"

"Well, you see, it ain't so easy a thing to answer that," replied the old lady, with provoking calmness. "My son Jem has queer ways o' his own, and doesn't always leave word even with his blessed mamma where he's to be found. I dessay now he's gone down to Leeds, or somewhere near that, on his own affairs; but he'll be back in the course of a day or two, never fear you that. And in the mean time we'll try to make you as comfortable as you can. I'm always glad to see a friend of Jem's in *this* house, specially when he comes alone."

"Zounds!" shouted Pocock; "is this a plant, or is the woman in her dotage? I give you warning that I am not to be trifled with."

“ I scorn your words, sir ! ” said the old lady, rising up and displaying Amazonian proportions. “ I never takes liberties with no man, least of all would I do so with a mouldy officer. Oho ! you’re for trying the door, are you ? Shake away, Mr Pocock, or kick, if you likes that better ! It’s good stout timber, double-bolted on the outside. Did you ever see a rat in a trap, Mr Pocock ? What ! that won’t do, won’t it ? Then I’m afeard you must just stay where you are ; for the window is rather narrow for a man o’ your size, and I rather think the same objection will apply to the chimney.”

“ You infernal old hag !——”

“ Hoity-toity, Mr Pocock ! Is that your perliteness to a lady ? But keep to your own side of the table, I advise you, my man, for I’ve got a tidy little bit of a revolver here, that can both bark and bite, if need be. And it’ll be better for you to keep quiet, old un ; for there’s three of my boys in the next room—wery fond o’ their mother, they are, though somewhat rough with their hands—and if I whistle them in, you may chance to get a kick on the stomach that won’t improve your digestion ! ”

The circumstances, it must be allowed, were such as would have tried the nerves of the bravest. What could Pocock do ? Evidently he had been decoyed into a place from which escape seemed perfectly hopeless ; for not only was the epicene individual before him in possession of firearms, but there were sinewy ruffians at hand, of whose proximity he was made aware by sundry tremendous oaths, doubtless growled

out for his especial edification, as a mastiff gives challenge from its kennel. To negotiate, therefore, seemed the wisest course ; so laying aside his staff, as a discomfited knight of the olden time would have thrown down his sword, Pocock craved a parley.

“ I knew,” said he, “ that I had a deep scoundrel to deal with ; but for the life o’ me I could not make out what sort of fellow he was. For you see, master, the woman’s clothes was all gammon and spinach ; but it *was* a good get-up, and took me in for a minute or so. I’ll say that, if it was my last word—a wery good get-up, as ever I saw at the playhouse.

“ ‘ Now then,’ says the fellow, ‘ I sees you’re coming round, Mr Pocock, and are going to be conformable, which is the best thing you can do ; and as I doesn’t intend any harm by you, but the reverse, unless you brings it on your own head, s’pose I offer you a glass of spirits and a mouthful o’ bread and bacon, by way of doing the honours of the house ?’

“ ‘ Thank you, ma’am,’ says I ; ‘ it would not be amiss, for I haven’t made much of a breakfast.’

“ ‘ That’s wot I thought,’ says he, sniggering, as he took a bottle and some victuals out of a cupboard ; ‘ and it’s a good sign that you can pick a bit, for I’ve known some that would not have felt much appetite sitting where you does. Here’s your very good health, Mr Pocock, and thanks to you for this friendly visit, which is rather more than I ventured to expect, for gentlemen of your kidney are rather shy of accepting strange invitations.’

“ ‘ Your good health, Mrs Anderton,’ says I, putting the best face on it I could ; for it’s best to be free and easy with characters of that kind, if you happen to find yourself in a fix.

“ ‘ Anderton be blowed !’ says he. ‘ Don’t you know who I be ? Well, I’ll tell you—I’m Rebecca !’

“ ‘ What !’ said I, ‘ her with the daughters, as used to smash the turnpike gates ?’

“ ‘ Just so, Mr Pocock,’ says he ; ‘ but I’ve given up them larks for a good while, and taken to another line of business. And now, as I have told you who I be, may I make so bold as to inquire what is your errand down here ; for it isn’t for nothing that the great Mr Pocock shows himself on circuit. You’ll understand that, for more reasons than one, it will be best for you to speak the truth.’

“ ‘ Well, I don’t think,’ says I, ‘ if you are Rebecca, that it’s any o’ your brood I am seeking. Least ways, I’m not down here to look after anything that’s been done on the crack, but purely on a London matter.’ For you see, sir, I know’d by this time, well enough, what sort o’ company I was in ; and that my life mightn’t be worth an hour’s purchase if they thought I was trying to cram them.

“ ‘ Tell that to the horse-marines !’ says he ; ‘ I knows better : you’ve come down on the information of a rogue that has peached to Jem Anderton, and your blood be on your own head if you persist in denying it !’

“ ‘ It’s a fact though,’ says I, ‘ upon my sacred word

of honour ; and that's what no man of character in the profession would say if it wasn't true. You need not believe it unless you like ; but I'm sworn to do my duty, and I'll do it, where I can, according to my warrant, but no further. I repeat that I have no provincial job on hand ; and it's not my line to take observations in this district of country, unless I am specially retained.'

" 'Then who is it you *are* after, Mr Pocock?' says he. 'For I must have that out of you before you leave this house ; and *how* you leave it, depends upon your answer. D—n all Rebeccas and nonsense ! Come, now I'll be plain with you. I'm a cracksman, sir ; and there are four of us here, all armed to the teeth ! You're in our power ; and I needn't tell you what *that* means, if you put us up to make mischief. I never was a bloody man, but I'd shoot you down as readily as I would a mad dog, if I thought you were trying to sell us. Speak out, man—it's the safest thing you can do—who is it you are after ?'

" 'He's a Jew,' says I—'one Speedwell, charged with a forgery in London. If he's a pal of yours, I've nothing further to say. You've got me into the trap, I admit, but I shan't die without biting.'

" 'Speedwell ? He's not one of my pals,' says he. 'If it be so, show us your warrant. This is a reckoning, remember, for life or for death.'

" I took it from my pocketbook, and handed it to him without any hesitation. He read it attentively.

" 'And you swear this is your whole business ?' says

he ; ‘and that you received no other instructions to bring you here.’

“ ‘I came down solely to make an arrest in the forgery case,’ says I. ‘And if you don’t believe my word, I’m ready to take the cutter’s oath.’

“ ‘Then, may the devil fly away with the idiot who set us on the wrong scent ! Look you, Mr Pocock, this may be an ugly job for all of us. We’ve been—no matter what we’ve been doing—but I thought you had come down about that, and so we trained you here ; and I don’t deny that we had a plan for putting you out of the way—nay, you needn’t start, or look so white in the gills—for a week or so, till the coast was clear. I see now that we were clean out of our reckoning, and I wish with all my heart we had never meddled with you. I’d be willing, for my part, to swear you upon blade and barker, and let you go, but the other chaps here will never agree to that ; so you must just take what comes : for if you make any row or resistance, as sure as you are a living man, you sleep this night at the bottom of the canal, with a stone round your neck, by way of comforter !’

“I’d been in one or two bad scrapes before,” continued Pocock, “but never in such a one as this. An ordinary thief is commonly a poor hen-hearted creature ; and you may walk into a flash-house where there are two dozen on ’em, and take out your man without much risk of the others venturing on a rush. But burglars and old convicts are a clean different set. They are, for the most part, desperate bloody-minded

villains, that will rather commit murder than give in ; and if they get a chance at an officer—especially if they bear him a grudge—it's likely he'll go down to his grave a maimed man, if they doesn't finish him on the spot. I wasn't much afraid of the fellow who called himself Rebecca, for he was of a better sort,—one of those clever chaps with some kind of education, who have, mayhap, been in an honest line, and they are seldom cruel ; but it was probable that the others might think as little of throttling an officer, as a butcher would of knocking down an ox in the shambles ; and a tempting shambles it was, to be sure, — a lonely deserted house, where no cries could be heard, and a deep muddy canal at the door, just convenient !

“ It's true I had my pistols about me, and that was something ; for I reflected that the chap in woman's clothes, if he really intended foul play, would have tried to bully me into giving them up,—*he* know'd well enough that we never go without barkers. And it's my opinion that he left them with me on purpose to keep his pals from attempting mischief,—for nothing frightens a bloodthirsty coward more than the sight of a pistol. So there was nothing for it but just to sit still, and take what Providence would send—Providence being mostly, as I've hear'd it observed, upon the side of the police.

“ The partition wall was but a thin one, and though I couldn't hear all that the men said, I hear'd enough to convince me that they weren't all agreeable to something that was proposed. It was not cheerful by no

means to hear such bits o' speech as, 'Slit his weaz-and!'—'Knock the spy on the head!'—'Barkers has he?'—'D— him! slip the bull-bitch at him—she'll tear out his throat in less than no time!' but by-and-by it seemed as if Rebecca got them pacified, and they began to talk about carrying off the swag. Then some o' them went out; and a while after there was a tramping on the stairs, and I hear'd a cart come up to the door; by which I knew that they were removing their booty, and that made me feel more comfortable and cheery-like, for I thought, now there was a fair chance of escape.

"Well, master, the day went by, and nobody came near me. The light grew fainter and fainter, for a thick mist had risen, and with the darkness ugly thoughts came back; for there's a cant saying that 'a misty night is the devil's delight;' and sure enough it holds out a positive temptation to murder. The cart had rolled off about an hour before, and there was no further sound of voices: but I heard somebody moving, and at last there came a heavy tramp up-stairs. I saw a light glimmer beneath the door—the bolts were drawn, and a dark figure entered, wrapt in a greatcoat, with a crape over his face.

"Now for it!" thinks I, keeping my pistol ready.

"'Sit still, sir,' said the man, whose voice I recognised to be that of Rebecca, but he spoke quite differently from the way he did in the morning,—more slow and solemn like.

"'Sit still, sir, and put away that toy. You have

nothing further to fear, and in a few minutes you shall be free. I have saved your life, Mr Pocock,—nay, more, I had to buy it, for there were those with me whom you have been hard on before now, and they were sworn to take revenge, if they could find the opportunity.’

“ ‘ Well,’ says I—for here he made a kind of pause—‘ I’m bound to acknowledge that, though this has been altogether an irregular kind o’ transaction, you’ve behaved handsome ; so let’s come to terms at once.’

“ ‘ Terms ?’ says he, with a kind o’ wild laugh ; ‘ do you think I’d have bought your life to make money of it ? You do not know your man, Mr Pocock,—but *I* know you ; and you may bless God for having put it into your heart to do a deed of charity years ago, else this would have been the last of your days. Do you remember the jewellery crack at Islington in 1839 ?’

“ ‘ Don’t I ?’ says I, for I felt quite pleasant-like, now we began to talk of professional business. ‘ That was the cleanest job that ever came under my notice. I worked a fortnight at it, but was no wiser at the end than a baby.’

“ ‘ But you made diligent search ; and at one house where you suspected the swag might be, you found, in a wretched garret, a poor lone woman with a sickly child, starving and abandoned. You saw that she was no common tramp or beggar—you gave her help, without which she must have died of want ; and you did more—you brought her case before the public

notice, and she was saved from misery and shame. Do you remember that ? ’

“ ‘ Yes, I do. I was sorry for the poor thing, who had been led astray ; and it’s always been my notion that a man who know’d the value of a good mother should be kind to a woman in distress.’

“ ‘ And, in doing that, you saved my wife and child ! There’s my hand, sir, if you don’t object to take that of an outlaw ; and however bad I may have been, there is no blood on it as yet. Nor shall there ever be ; for rather than continue to herd with the human brutes I am leagued with, I would cross the sea and begin an honourable life elsewhere.’

“ ‘ If that’s your view,’ says I, ‘ I think I could make it quite easy for you. It would cost no more than a simple surrender for some small job, not wery deadly, and I’d answer for a free ticket, and more than that, as soon as you landed in a penal colony.’

“ ‘ Ha, ha ! ’ says he, ‘ you mistake me quite. There’s work yet to be done in old Europe. Another shaking of the thrones is near, and, even now, a strong arm has its price. But I have no time to lose. All I require from you is that you do not stir from this for the next twenty minutes. After that you are free, and may do precisely as you please. I return you your staff—I know that you have your pistols ready : do we part friends or enemies ? ’

“ I couldn’t help it, master—though it wasn’t perhaps what a man of my official standing should have

said ; but I said he was a brick, and God bless him ! and so he left me.

“ I always keep my word ; but it was no easy matter to sit out the twenty minutes in a lone house like that, and in a room that was as dark as a dungeon. I could only guess how time went, for I couldn't see the face of my watch ; but at last I groped my way to the door, walked gingerly down stairs, and got out into the mist that was driving past so thick that you could almost have cut it with a knife. Just then I hears a low growl behind me, and I know'd it was the bull-bitch ! So I made a bolt right forward, and went splash head foremost into the canal. How I got out of it I can't explain, but I did reach the bank somehow, and then I took across the country as hard as my legs would carry me, without knowing in the least where I was. You'll never know what ditches and hedgerows are, master, until you have tried a blind run in the fog ! At last I found myself on the highway ; and presently a return post-chaise came up, which I hailed, and so I got back to Torcaster.”

Such was the sum total of Mr Pocock's confessions, the uttering of which seemed to operate upon him as a sensible relief ; for there is no man who does not find a certain pleasure in recounting a personal adventure, even though it may not redound to his glory, or materially enhance his fame. It was our turn next to relate the events of the day, including the capture of Speedwell, which feat Mr Pocock, after some unim-

portant criticism, admitted to have been very creditably performed, considering that it was the work of novices.

“It’s a satisfactory thing,” said he, “that he has been caught at the poisoning ; for that will be nuts to the insurance offices, and mayhap will put something into my pocket ; but I can’t allow him to remain here on that charge. I’ve the first warrant, and off he goes with me to London to-morrow by a forenoon train. But this other business won’t be allowed to sleep, you may depend on that. Trafficking in lives has become rather common of late, and this here is as nice a sample as one would wish to set before a jury.”

And so we parted, all of us well pleased to retire to rest after a day of such fatigue and excitement.

CHAPTER XII.

EXPLANATIONS OF VARIOUS KINDS.

How my friend, the detective, contrived to arrange matters with the magisterial authorities I do not know ; but he was as good as his word, for early on the ensuing morning he departed with the captive Speedwell. And so, like one of the phantom forms that glide across the stage behind the seething witch-caldron in Macbeth, vanisheth from my story the portly apparition of the Pocock.

Dr Menelaws reported favourably of Littlewoo, adding, however, that he was yet too weak to be removed, and suggesting that he should be left at Torcaster for a few days longer in order to recover strength—an arrangement of which I cordially approved, as his presence in London was not required, and might have been an embarrassment. The poor fellow was still nervous, though greatly relieved by the certainty that he had got rid at last of his arch enemy ; and he expressed himself not only as grateful for what had been done, but willing for the future to be ruled by

the advice and submit to the guidance of Mr Shear-away. Nor could I doubt the sincerity, though I might question the durability, of his penitence ; for vice and dissipation had not obliterated the home affections, and while these remain there is always some chance of amendment.

I spent the greater part of the day with Menelaws, renewing the recollections of our youth ; but the remorseless hours went swiftly by, and the time came when I had to return to London. Davie Osett, however, declined to bear me company.

“ The fact is, Mr Norman,” said he, “ that being sae far north already, I think I shall e’en stretch a point, and gang down, for a day or two, to the Birkenshaws. I dinna ken how it is, but it feels to me as if the air here were twice as caller as it is about London ; and I’m ower near the Border not to hae a hankering after the wimpling burns, and the ferny braes, and the braid loch that you and I used to dander about when we were little mair than weans. Then I want to see how the auld man is, for he’ll be yammering about me as Jacob did about Benjamin ; and I fancy I can hear Auntie Eppie skirlin’ wi’ delight when I tell her how you and I grippit the Jew. Ye’ll no persuade her that the scoundrel wasna as strong as Samson, or at least as Joab, the captain of King David’s host. I’ll no bide lang, but I maun see the Birkenshaws before the sun has twice gane down.”

There was no resisting so reasonable a proposal, so we parted ; my foster-brother turning his face to the

north, and I whirling back to London behind the panting locomotive.

My first visit was paid to Mr Poins, who was labouring under a fit of excitement quite extraordinary in an elderly London solicitor, who did not abandon the use of hair-powder until he found himself in a minority of one as regarded the application of the dredging-box.

“I congratulate you, Mr Sinclair,” he said, “on the result of your expedition. It is a great triumph, sir. Pocock has explained to me the peculiar circumstances of the case, and there can be no doubt that your promptitude and precaution were of most essential service. Sir, you may be proud of what you have done—quite as proud as I should be in gaining a reversal in the Upper House of a decision that had been come to by a committee of the House of Commons.”

“I am obliged to you, Mr Poins,” I said, “for the compliment ; but the result is not more than we anticipated when we last met in this very room.”

“Pardon me, Mr Sinclair, the result is of greater importance than any of us supposed. The apprehension of that man Speedwell might not in itself have been sufficient to clear up the mystery of the forgeries, but a providential circumstance has occurred which will make the whole transaction as clear as day, and remove every shadow of suspicion from the character of Mr Beaton. I have extreme satisfaction in informing you that the missing secretary, Dobigging, is now in the hands of the police.”

“That is great news indeed!” said I. “How did that happen?”

“The vessel in which he had embarked for America was wrecked on the Irish coast. Few lives were lost; but the Liverpool authorities, who had been warned to look out for Dobigging (though the warning did not reach them until the vessel had put to sea), were on the alert; and, hearing of the disaster, they despatched a smart emissary, who had no difficulty in discovering his man. Both rogues being in custody, there will probably be a competition between them for the honourable post of Queen’s evidence; and as the secretary is the party whom the shareholders will be most anxious to convict, I think the chances are that your friend Mr Speedwell will be selected to make the disclosure.”

“And be hanged afterwards for having attempted murder?”

“Why, no—I should imagine that transportation is the utmost penalty that will be inflicted; though many a one far less guilty than he is, has ere now been sent to the gallows.”

“And Mr Beaton—how did he receive the intelligence?”

“Much more quietly than I expected; indeed, I am puzzled to account for the marked change in his demeanour. You have seen enough of him to be aware how impetuous and self-willed he was—now, there is hardly any trace of that defiant spirit. Yet nothing I have observed leads me to think that his

misfortunes have broken him down, or at all impaired his intellect. He betrays no lack of acuteness in discourse, and his apprehension is as vivid as before, but I cannot persuade him to make any effort towards retrieving his affairs. No later than yesterday he said, ‘Why would you have me rack my brain for that which can avail me nothing? Don’t you see, Poin, that I have lost the game, and with it every shilling I possessed! Would you have me pick up the cards, and play them out again, in order to discover how it was that I chanced to lose? No, no! Save but my honour, and let the rest perish, and its memory too. Sell everything—make no struggle for a reversion. May my hand wither if I withhold one penny from those who have a legal claim against me! Once free of these encumbrances, the world shall know that Richard Beaton is no pitiful hound to grovel and howl under the lash of misfortune.’”

“That would seem to indicate that he has already formed some plan for the future,” I said. “Undismayed by overthrow, he is again preparing for the contest. I cannot but admire his gallantry. He shows the spirit of a hero!”

“Yes,” replied Poin, dryly; “but we don’t make heroes of our merchants, especially when they happen to be unfortunate. But you are right so far. There is no rest for Beaton. Other men, when they have attained wealth, settle down to enjoy it. Beaton never could have done that. He must work at something, else he would sink into hopeless idiocy; and it is quite

possible, if he can find a proper field for his energies, that he may yet lay the foundation of a second fortune."

"Can you form any conjecture as to the nature of his scheme?" I inquired.

"Not from any hint thrown out by himself," said Mr Poins. "Beaton never was communicative as to his projects; and of course, under present circumstances, he can have arrived at no fixed determination. However, I can see well enough that some notion or other has taken possession of his mind. Whatever it may be, I think it highly improbable that he will remain in this country. He is much too proud for that; nor will he submit to be a subordinate. I think he will look out for some foreign connection, and go abroad."

"Taking his family with him?" said I, almost involuntarily.

"Nay!" replied Poins, with something like a smile; "that must depend a good deal upon circumstances. I hardly think that Mrs Walton is so necessary to his comfort that she will be invited to share his exile; and if I may judge from appearances, his daughter need not expatriate herself in order to find a home. But I shan't say anything more upon that subject, Mr Sinclair, the rather as I have no reason to suppose that you are any way interested therein."

For shame, Mr Poins! That was an unfair thrust; but I could not parry it, or even look the old gentleman steadily in the face, so I let him enjoy his advantage. The fact is that the shrewd lawyer had pene-

trated to my secret, arguing that the zeal I had manifested in the cause of Mr Beaton must arise from some other motive than mere general philanthropy.

“I ought, however, to mention,” continued Poins, “that Beaton is evidently much impressed by your exertions in his behalf. He is, I think, conscious that he has done you wrong; and I will say this for him, that he is far above the common meanness of hating more bitterly upon that account. So take that to your comfort, my young friend, in case you doubt his feelings in regard to yourself. But do not ask to see him for a few days. I shall let you know when an interview will be acceptable.”

I next repaired to the Stanhopes, where I was fortunate enough to find George Carlton in dutiful attendance upon Amy.

“Welcome, thou modern Titus!” cried Carlton; “welcome from thy victory over the Jew! Say, Amy, what reward does the conqueror deserve, who returns from the field of battle with the captive at his chariot wheels?”

“I suspect,” said Amy, “the sole reward which Mr Sinclair covets is thanks from a certain fair lady, which, I can promise him, will not be withheld.”

“But where is she, Miss Stanhope? Have you seen her lately?”

“Very lately; and you shall see her too when your conversation with George is ended; for I cannot flatter myself that you came here solely out of compliment to me. In short, dearest Mary is now residing here.

With which announcement I shall leave you gentlemen to your talk."

Carlton then informed me that there had been a regular explosion in Mr Beaton's establishment ; Mrs Walton having become so violent as to drive even the patient Barker into rebellion, and having insisted on forcing her way, spite of all opposition, into her brother's study. Mr Beaton had by this time somewhat recovered from his lethargy, though still confused from the effects of a strong opiate ; yet for a few minutes he endured with apparent passiveness the storm of objurgation and reproach which Mrs Walton launched at his head. Solomon has said that a soft answer turneth away wrath ; but absolute silence has not always the like effect. The irritated woman probably thought that he was tongue-tied by the consciousness that he had injured her cruelly ; and, gaining additional courage from his presumed meekness, she raved like another Xantippe. No medicine that the science of the physicians might have suggested, could have been so effectual for the recovery of Mr Beaton. He rose, not a debilitated and dispirited man, but with as commanding a mien and imperious a will as when his word was the law to many, and the frantic woman instantly quailed before him. She fled from his presence ; and then, according to Barker's account, he began deliberately to set his house in order, exhibiting as much precision, or even more, than was his wont. Mary he saw only for a few moments ; but in spite of her earnest entreaties he

would not suffer her to remain with him. The Windermeres as well as the Stanhopes had pressed her to come to them, but Mary preferred the society of her early friend. Mrs Walton had decamped, bag and baggage, carrying with her, it was alleged, many more articles of jewellery and *vertu* than she had brought to the house; and such was her haste that she did not even pause to bestow a parting benediction on her niece. The house was cleared, with the sole exception of the study; and of all the servants Barker alone remained, the faithful fellow absolutely refusing to quit his master in the day of desolation and distress.

“Amy tells me,” said Carlton, “that but for this forced separation from her father, Mary would be perfectly cheerful. But the old man was peremptory, and to have persisted would have given him annoyance; besides, as you are well aware, he is by no means of a domestic turn. For the rest, she is well pleased to escape from the endless whirl of gaiety, which she never liked, and the attentions of various disinterested gentlemen, which had become positively disagreeable. One thing I can tell you—Pentland is out of the field. He is off in a yacht to the Mediterranean, in order that a decent interval may elapse before he pays his addresses to Miss Ingotson, the banking heiress, who, I understand, has the priority on his list. But you have had another rival, Sinclair, and a very formidable one too. Lumley has been here.”

“Lumley!” I cried; “impossible!”

“Nay, hear me out,” said Carlton. “I know perfectly well to what you allude. Lumley, knowing my intimacy with you, came here; but it was to confer with me. What he said I must not reveal; beyond this, that had lack of fortune been an obstacle to your union with Miss Beaton, that would certainly have been removed. Norman, I do not believe that there ever was a nobler fellow than Lumley!”

“True—most true,” said I. “He *is* a noble fellow; but—but—I wish to heaven he had not been so unnecessarily communicative!”

“Ah, there’s your pride again!” said Carlton. “Really there is no knowing how to deal with you Caledonians. Lumley, I daresay, likes you well enough—indeed I know that he has a high regard for you—but his object was not your advancement, but a chivalrous and honourable wish to promote the happiness of a most estimable lady, whom he respects, admires, and—”

“Loves, you would say? Out with it, Carlton; nay, man, don’t boggle at the phrase! Since there must be an episode of knight-errantry, let me at least have the benefit of the whole details.”

“Well, supposing that I did say he loved her, what right have you to object? O Norman!—my dear friend—is it possible that you can be so blinded, even by temporary jealousy, as not to see and appreciate the singular generosity of this man? Can you set no value on his forbearance, on his delicacy, on his self-abnegation? Has he ever crossed your path? or

rather, has he not made way for you, sacrificing what all men must account a most reasonable hope rather than sever affections which he believes to be already engaged? If you cannot see that, then I say that Lumley is more worthy to win her than you are!”

Carlton spoke, as was his way, with so much earnestness and deep sincerity, that I could not help feeling that he had the best of the argument, and that I was wilfully placing myself in a false position. But I need not tell lovers, past or present—from which category few persons beyond the age of eighteen are excluded—that the honeyed cup of expectation is never free from a certain touch of the gall of jealousy; and that, though the sweet immensely preponderates over the bitter, the flavour of the latter is so strong that it still lingers on the lips. I was not absolutely jealous of Lumley—that is, I did not suppose him capable of harbouring a desire to supplant me in the affections of Miss Beaton—but I felt disposed to resent what appeared to me almost an unwarrantable interference. Generosity, though it is a quality much to be commended, does not always beget gratitude; and I could not help thinking that, since Lumley had thought proper to divulge his very munificent intentions to Carlton, the latter might have had the discretion to abstain from making me aware of the circumstance. Few men of spirit like to be patronised; and the nearer you stand in your own estimate to another person, the less are you disposed to accept from him a gratuitous benefit which must imply a great and lasting obligation.

Now, though Lumley had the advantage of me, both as regarded wealth and position in society, still I was a gentleman, and so far entitled to look upon him as an equal; and it was exceedingly irksome to me to hear him thus lauded for magnanimity in a matter essentially personal to myself.

“Carlton,” said I, “you were pleased just now to make reference to my pride; and if I recollect aright, it is not the first time that you have done so. Let me tell you, my good fellow, that in that respect we are pretty much on a par; for I know no man more ready than you are to resent a slight, or to writhe under the weight of an obligation. If you were in my position, and were to be informed that a gentleman who had once seriously thought of paying his addresses to Miss Stanhope, but who had courteously waived his pretensions in deference to your prior claims, was making inquiries as to your pecuniary circumstances, with the avowed intention of providing you with a handsome annuity in case you were otherwise not rich enough to marry—would you be disposed to feel very grateful? There is no man of all my acquaintance who would receive such a proposition with a worse grace—if, indeed, you did not make it a positive ground for quarrel! And do you blame me for having simply expressed a wish that Lumley had not been quite so ready with his offers of assistance? Generous he is, beyond all manner of doubt; but I cannot admit that he has shown much delicacy in this matter.”

“No, Sinclair!” replied Carlton, with some emotion.

“Therein, at least, you are wrong. Lumley’s conduct throughout has been perfect—I am the party to blame. Norman! I could bite through my tongue for having been so inexpressibly stupid as to blurt out this—the more so as I have broken faith with Lumley, who conjured me not to whisper a word as to his intentions. Now have I, through my foolish indiscretion, made you perhaps detest the man whom you ought most especially to esteem!”

“Nay, George—now you are flying off at a tangent in the other direction! Lumley must ever command my esteem, and my gratitude too—though on other grounds than this last token of his goodwill. Think no more of it, and let us drop the subject for ever.”

“Well, this shall be a lesson to me for the future. I’ll purvey me a statue of Harpocrates, and study how to rule my tongue. By the way, you will regret to hear that another of your rivals has disappeared.”

“Indeed! who may that be?”

“No less a personage than the Honourable Sholto Linklater. He has been trying his luck at the rails with dismal success; buying, with unerring instinct, the most suspicious kind of shares, which, whenever he purchased them, were sure to go down; so in order to avoid the Philistines, Sholto has transferred himself to Boulogne, where he is trying to earn a precarious subsistence at the billiard-table.”

“Poor fellow! I hope that something may turn up for him yet.”

“There is always hope for the man whose father is a

peer and a Whig. Rarely does one of that class fail to extract a balsam from the box of Pandora. But come—I see by the expression of your eye that you are thinking of other matters. Notwithstanding your sneer at knight-errantry, you, who have been out on an adventure, shall have the privilege of telling it to the lady you adore.”

What followed, however interesting to ourselves, is of no consequence to the reader ; so I shall omit love-passages, which, when narrated in the first person, are always odious and impertinent. Many of you, my beloved hearers of both sexes, have been wooers or wooed ; and that being the case, you require no enlightenment on the sort of conversation which is practised on such occasions. You know perfectly well that in those delicious interviews coherency is entirely sacrificed, sentiment discarded as a hypocritical contrivance, and eloquence about the last thing in the world which any one would attempt to introduce. Elderly spinsters who have never known the luxury of a lover, and maidens in their teens who long for the possession of a slave, have a firm and undeviating faith in the veracity of the speeches which adroit novelists assign to their characters in every stage of the mysterious process of love-making, and accept the language of the melodrama for that of overwhelming passion. Shakespeare true to nature ? Never was there a more preposterous delusion ! Can you, sir or madam, imagine two young persons—let us call them Romeo and Juliet—conversing in a moonlit garden in beautiful blank-verse, cull-

ing out the choicest rhetorical figures, and uttering them in language so perfect, and tones so pathetic, that the nightingale in the pomegranate tree ceases her amorous descant to listen to music more sweet and witching than her own? Never, by any child of the houses of Montague or Capulet, were such harmonies as those conceived; for the language of true love is scarcely more intelligible than the babbles of a child, who feels a new joy in his heart, but lacks the power to give it adequate expression. Therefore say I—

“*Procul, O, procul este profani!*”

Let love speak for itself in its own hieroglyphic mode, with its strange contractions, elisions, and pantomime which is not resolvable into any known form of speech; but do not, as you would avoid the scourge of Rhadamanthus and the heavy vengeance of insulted Cupid, parade before us your enamoured pairs, talking sublime platitudes in periods of the most perfect exactitude, and ransacking creation for metaphors and similes so outrageously extravagant, that even a poet would hesitate to set them down, lest he should be suspected of midsummer madness. Think you that the silver-tongued Ulysses made a touching oration when he asked the adored Penelope to become his bride? Not he! He looked very much like a booby, and his speech was no better than a stammer.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHEARAWAY TAKES HIS DEPARTURE.

My excellent friend Shearaway was no sooner made aware of the position of the unfortunate Littlewoo, than he commenced his preparations for departing homeward, intending to touch at Torcaster on the way, for the purpose of taking that misguided youth along with him.

“What we are to make of him when we do get him home, Norman,” said he, “passes my judgment. It would never do to let him rake about Edinburgh; and I doubt whether he would like being boarded out. It’s perhaps not a right thing to say, but I sometimes think that mitigated slavery, under due restrictions, would be an important adjunct to civilisation. The Romans, who were shrewd old carles, saw that clear enough; for I mind the Professor of Civil Law telling us in his lectures, that a father might scourge his grown-up bairns, send them to work in the country, or even put them to death if they deserved it. That was sharp practice, no doubt, but it kept the ne’er-do-weels

in grand order; and something of the kind, in my humble opinion, is very much wanted in this country."

"Heyday, Mr Shearaway! Do you advocate a direct interference with the liberty of the subject?"

"Liberty of a fiddlestick!" replied Shearaway. "When the subject, as you call him, becomes fatuous or demented, you take the liberty, and the law enforces it, of clapping him into limbo. And what for? Just that he may be restrained from doing an injury either to himself or others. But if a fellow becomes a habitual drunkard, sotting away his brains, squandering his means, disgracing his family, beating his wife, and making himself a general nuisance, the law, forsooth, declines to interfere! Is that sense? There's a human soul going openly to perdition for want of restraint — a soul that might be saved, and a body that might be made useful, if reasonable coercion were employed—but that's clean contrary to the principles of the British constitution! *Civis Romanus sum!* My faith, if any young Roman lad had behaved like Jamie Littlewoo, the Prætor would soon have disposed of that plea! The deboshed *civis* would either have been drafted into the nearest recruiting legion, or been sent to work at the mines. Life is but a pilgrimage, Norman, for the strongest as well as the weakest; and if a man cannot guide himself, he should be put into a gang, and be forced to march onwards whether he will or no."

"Nevertheless, Mr Shearaway, we must take the law as we find it. I hope you will be able to devise some-

thing for the poor fellow, who has already suffered a great deal, and seems thoroughly repentant of his folly. There are good points in him which really give me hope for the future."

Shearaway shook his head.

"There are two kinds of men," said he, "that I defy you to keep from going to the mischief. The one is the obstinate, arrogant idiot, who will listen to no advice, but thinks himself far wiser than the rest of mankind. I've two or three such among my clients—lairds they are, who think to better themselves by speculation—and it's as much as I can do to prevent them from ruining themselves, stoup and roup, by interposing delays ; for which service, you will readily understand, they are quite the reverse of grateful. The other is the pure, natural bauldy, soft as wax, that takes the impression of every seal, no matter what has been stamped on it before. Now, to apply the doctrine : James Littlewoo is the lad of wax—have a care, Norman, my man, that you don't make me think you belong to the other division."

"You amaze me, Mr Shearaway ! Pray, what have I done to bring me within the scope of your censure?"

"Let me first ask you a question. What is the cause of the extraordinary interest you take in the affairs of that man Beaton ? It is but reasonable to suppose that you have some motive ; and I can think of none, but that you have somehow committed yourself, and perhaps become his security. That's a rock upon which even the most prudent are apt to split ;

for it's difficult to say 'no' to an old man who is beseeching you to save him from ruin at the mere cost of a scrape of your pen, though in fact a loaded pistol would be a far less dangerous plaything. I cannot get it out of my head, but that you are some way compromised."

"If it were so, Mr Shearaway, I am sure you would not advise me to repudiate a solemn engagement. But cheer up, my old friend, and don't look so doleful, at least upon my account. In brief, be it known to you that Mr Beaton has a daughter——"

"Oho!" cried Shearaway. "Sits the wind in that quarter? Beshrew me for a doited auld bachelor in not having thought of that before! Ay! I might have minded the old saying, 'It's never sae dark but that you may see the flaucht of a petticoat!' But is it arranged, Norman? Is it a settled affair, or only a kind of fancy of your own? In a word, are ye committed?"

"I am, my friend; as fully as honourable vows and honest love can bind a gentleman."

"Then I give you joy, Norman," said Shearaway, "with all my heart! The best thing a man can do is to settle himself before he becomes old and crotchety; it's likely to be best for his happiness both here and hereafter. Ay me, Norman! It gives me a sore heart to think, now that my hairs are grey, what a cosy hearth might have been mine if I had but been wise in time. But I was overly cautious, and could not make up my mind; so I went on from year to

year, never marking how time slipped by, till I found myself an elderly man in the midst of a new generation! And now, when I come home on a cold winter's night, wearied and jaded, there are no kind voices to welcome me—no smiles to cheer me up. I have nothing to speak to but the pussy-cat; and she, poor beast, is often more taken up about her kittens—for she's an awful breeder—than about her master! You're right to marry, Norman, though you will get no fortune with your bride. But what of that? You are well enough provided already, and it would be sinful to wish for more."

"You must understand, however, Mr Shearaway, that the matter is by no means arranged, for I have not yet asked Mr Beaton's consent, and it is quite possible that he may object to such a marriage."

"I think you need have little apprehension on that score," replied Shearaway. "When the settlements are all on one side there can be no reasonable objection; and unless he is an absolute heathen, the man cannot help feeling bound to you for the zeal you have shown in his behalf. No, no! you'll get Beaton's consent, sure enough; but I advise you, after you are married, to keep as far away from him as you can. Give him a wide berth, Norman! You are not the kind of lad to submit patiently to domineering, and Beaton is as peremptory as a Turk, or a half-pay captain of the navy."

"Certainly you are right there," I replied; "and that consideration confirms the intention I had already

formed of leaving London, and residing for the future in Scotland."

"I'm blithe to hear you say so!" cried Shearaway. "I'll be on the look-out for a purchase of an improvable estate that will give you both amusement and occupation, as I take it for granted you would not care about qualifying yourself for the bar. It is an honourable profession, doubtless; but the gowns are so plenty already that there's more dust than guineas to be swept from the floor of the Parliament House; and I often marvel how some of the poor lads yonder contrive to get salt to their porridge. But they are a fine light-hearted race; and it does one good to hear them cracking their jokes at the fireplace, as merrily as though their pockets were crammed with bank-notes."

"If I were forced to choose a profession," said I, "unquestionably I would select the bar. But I really feel no ambition that way; nor are my circumstances such as to render it necessary that I should again submit myself to the rule of Themis. So by all means look out for an estate."

"Enough said! And now farewell, Norman, and may God bless you! When we next forgather, may it be under the shadow of Arthur's Seat."

CHAPTER XIV.

HOAXING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

IT will readily be conceived that my active participation in the events which I have already detailed, interfered grievously with my duties as a journalist ; and I now resolved, without waiting for the *denouement*, at once to relinquish my engagement. And here let me remark, for the satisfaction of young men who may be tempted or compelled to cultivate letters as a profession, that there is no sillier prejudice than that which certain narrow-minded persons entertain against a connection with the daily press. My own experience justifies me in saying that I consider such an occupation as more wholesome, bracing, and conducive to the development of mental power, than any other kind of literary training. Dexterity, clear perception, skilful arrangement, and nervous expression, are the qualities most valued in a journalist ; and these, I venture to assert, cannot be attained by brooding over sentimental verses, or inditing metaphysical discourses, or, indeed, in any other way than by constant and assiduous prac-

tice. It has been alleged that this kind of writing is apt to deteriorate style, and to induce slovenly habits of composition. I reply, that the work, from its very nature, demands a rigid abstinence from verbosity, obscurity, and tinsel ornament ; that the style must be so perspicuous as at once to convey the distinct idea to the reader, without subjecting him to the pain of a reperusal ; whilst, on the other hand, it must be so pointed and terse as to attract and rivet his attention. I do not know where, at the present day, you can find better specimens of pure English composition than those which appear in the columns of the newspaper. press ; and though these may be called in one sense ephemeral, since their interest passes away with the memory of the events to which they refer, they nevertheless exercise a deep and lasting influence on the thought and culture of the age. Those who remember what country papers were some five-and-twenty years ago, cannot fail to be struck with the immensity of the improvement which has been made. The prevailing tone of modern journalism is very different from what it was in the days of our fathers ; when the flatness of general imbecility was only relieved by bursts of scurrilous vituperation, and when no higher mental accomplishment, and no wider range of knowledge, were deemed necessary for the qualification of an editor, than would now be expected from a candidate for a subordinate post in the departments of Customs or Excise. Only in a few remote nooks of the country, where literature has as yet taken but a

feeble root, do we occasionally light upon a newspaper of the antiquated kind ; but it needs little more than a glance at their vile typography and beggarly aspect—setting aside altogether the stale scraps and broken meat that constitute their literary banquet—to be aware that they are doomed to a speedy and most salutary extermination.

Those who confine themselves to journalism only, cannot expect to survive in libraries ; and their names will unquestionably be forgotten so soon as they shall have entered into the famous nations of the dead. But the roll of fame is but a brief one, if in it we include those only whose works will be familiar to the coming generations ; and as for mere mention in a catalogue, why, that is a kind of immortality in which strumpets, scoundrels, and malefactors have an exorbitant share. The journalist who performs his duty in a conscientious and honourable manner, is, I fearlessly maintain, as useful a member of the body politic as either the physician or the highest educational teacher ; and at least as much so as the lawyer, though men of that class are apt to set forth pretensions to peculiar dignity. That conviction, I know, is dawning upon the minds, not only of the slothful and supercilious, who were wont to consider it a degrading thing for a gentleman to stain his fingers with daily or hebdomadal ink, but also of the corpulent academical leviathans who are reluctant to pass through their whalebone strainers any species of nutrition that is not of the Attic flavour. Considering the amount of maceration

that Attic literature has undergone, and the innumerable instances in which it has been swallowed and disgorged, freshness at least is not the quality to which it can lay any sort of claim ; and amidst the countless varieties of diet which quacks have recommended to our notice since the days of Avicenna or Dioscorides, no one, so far as I am aware, has ventured to suggest a perpetual course of ambergris.

I have been guilty, in the course of the foregoing narrative, of so many digressions, with far less reason to plead as my excuse than in this, that I make no apology to the general reader for bearing testimony in the cause of journalism. Rather let me apologise to my brethren for a weak and sorry protest, which many of them, were they so minded, could have stated with much more vigour and effect.

It was incumbent upon me to make known to Mr Osborne without delay the resolution which I had formed ; and I was just on the point of sitting down to write to him when little Attie Faunce made his appearance.

Master Attie, like other gentlemen of a mercurial temperament, was occasionally afflicted by fits of ennui, arising from lack of occupation ; being precisely the kind of malady to which the familiar imp who served Michael Scott was liable, and which he could not shake off until his master ordered him to twist the sea-sand into adhesive cables. It is not so easy to kill time as some men imagine ; for although a considerable portion of our hours may be disposed of in

sleeping, eating, drinking, billiard-playing, and other amusements, there is, I verily believe, a certain craving for work which even the most idle experience—a divine monition mercifully devised to warn and stimulate the sluggard. In no other way can I account for the singular tasks which men of fortune often undertake, for the sake, I suppose, of persuading themselves that they are really doing something. One gentleman, with no strong scientific promptings, shall commence the formation of a private museum of butterflies, beetles, or birds' eggs—another, without even the remotest glimpse of the doctrines or tendencies of geology, walks abroad with a hammer vehemently splitting stones, and decorates his study with a cart-load of the most absolute rubbish—a third drives the neighbourhood mad by practising on the French horn, from which instrument he extracts sounds more hideous than the vociferations of a deserted donkey—a fourth, with as much taste for the fine arts as a chimpanzee, takes to photography, producing figures fit only to be used as illustrations for a work on the natural history of abortions—a fifth purveys him a turning-lathe, and slices off his finger-ends in the vain attempt to fabricate a set of pieces as the furniture of a backgammon-board! What kind of casual work gave Attie Faunce occupation I never exactly ascertained; but he read a good deal in a miscellaneous and discursive way, and had a neat turn for tossing off an epigram or a squib, with which effusions he occasionally enlivened the pages of a weekly print.

Now, however, Attie appeared to be in a most dolorous condition—exceedingly down in the mouth (to borrow a vulgar but expressive phrase)—and covetous of sympathy; which, by the way, is an emollient not always readily accorded. Merry fellows pay a severe penalty for their habitual exuberance of spirits. They can hardly persuade their friends that they are serious, even when they are writhing with distress; and had Momus shown himself in the Olympian hall when labouring under the agonies of toothache, doubtless his sore torture would have been regarded by the other deities as an exquisite jest, and the narrative of his pangs been received with a roar of unextinguishable laughter.

Not being an Olympian, however, I had some spare sympathy to bestow on my lively friend, who incontinently threw himself down on the sofa, and protested that he was the most miserable of men.

“What has gone wrong with you, Attie?” said I. “Nothing very serious, I venture to predict, else you would not be quite so demonstrative.”

“O, Sinclair, I am utterly wretched! You won’t perhaps believe me, but I feel at times so melancholy, and so savage with myself, that I could almost take a flying leap from the parapets of Westminster Bridge! Indeed, rather than continue to endure this state of uncertainty, and have every action of mine misconstrued in the cruelest way, I think I shall pack up a few traps and be off to the Rocky Mountains!”

“To get your scalp taken off by some beastly savage,

or to provide a breakfast for a grizzly bear? Well—there is no accounting for tastes! But do, pray, be less enigmatical, and tell me what is your immediate disquieting cause.”

“Well then—since you must needs know it—life is worthless to me unless I can marry my cousin, Janey Osborne.”

“Life is never worthless, Attie; but lovers have the privilege of hyperbole. I recollect you hinted to me as much once before. Pardon me for putting so direct a question, but have you received any discouragement?”

“Not from her, Sinclair! She is as fine an open-hearted girl as ever lived, and I am sure would take me with all my faults. Indeed, she has confessed as much; for, you know, young people cannot be often together without giving some indication of their feelings; so one day, about a month ago, finding myself alone with Janey, I began to talk more seriously than is my wont—faith, after all, very little talk passed between us!—but we came to an understanding; and it was agreed that I should break the matter to my uncle.”

“Which you did, Faunce, I trust, without undue delay?”

“In the course of that very afternoon I had an interview with my respected relative. I never felt any difficulty in speaking to uncle Osborne about an ordinary matter, but on this occasion I was as nervous as any criminal when brought into the presence of his

judge. The old gentleman heard me out quite quietly, though I could see by the twitching of his mouth that he also was a good deal agitated; and then put the usual question—for I concealed nothing—why I had not applied to him in the first instance, before making a declaration to my cousin? I answered—what was the truth—that I really could not help it; and asked him if his own juvenile recollections could not suggest an excuse for deviating from the recognised diplomatic method. That passed muster well enough; but then came a lecture upon my habits, ways, and mode of living, which made it apparent, to my horror, that uncle Osborne was quite as cognisant of my doings as Fouché could have been of those of a Royalist conspirator, when he was at the head of the French police! Hang me, if I don't think the old gentleman maintains at his own cost a special establishment of spies!

“Inconvenient, certainly! And what was your line of defence?”

“I attempted none; but laid the blame on youth, thoughtlessness, inexperience, and so forth, which was all very well in its way—but you see, Sinclair, I could not contrive to disassociate them from myself. I was somewhat tempted to let fly at him a shaft that would have galled him sorely, in the shape of a reflection upon the little control which he thought proper to exercise over me during the years of my minority; but fortunately I had sense enough to abstain from such a blunder. Then he became pathetic—and very pathetic

he was too, I can assure you—about the happiness of his only child ; which part of the discourse — don't laugh now—affected me so much that I fairly began to whimper. According to dramatic rules, that should have concluded the negotiation ; but no ! There are some questionable examples in the Old Testament which Christians will persist in following : and uncle Osborne, it would appear, has a high regard for the authority of Laban. So the colloquy ended by my being put upon my good behaviour for six months ; during which time I was to be absolutely debarred from the slightest exhibition of eccentricity, and my visits to the villa were interdicted."

"And do you complain of that ?" said I. "Could you possibly have expected a lighter penance for scores of former absurdities ?"

"Yes !" replied Faunce. "And I have good reason to complain. Why keep a poor fellow like myself, who has no regular occupation, from seeing the girl that he loves ? Why drive him, since he must be in a state of excitement, to discover some mode of getting rid of his superfluous energy ? Is it your opinion, Sinclair, that a man in such a position would be inclined to devote himself to the elucidation of one of Aristotle's confounded treatises ; or to make extracts from blue-books, according to the method suggested to you by Sir George Smoothly, that paragon of crimps ? I am rather too hot-blooded an animal to submit to such a process !"

“ Then what was your resolve ? ” said I.

“ Why, I thought at first of going to the Continent for some little time, by way of improving myself, you know — Paris affords most capital opportunities for that. But then it occurred to me that the old gentleman might take it into his head that I was trying to escape from his surveillance ; and, faith, I had found him so suspicious already, that it would have been highly dangerous to have run any further risk. It would have been absurd to have boarded myself with a clergyman ; and if I had gone to the Westmoreland lakes, as a friend suggested, I am sure I should have expired of ennui. So I made up my mind to remain in London, and keep as quiet as possible.”

“ I suppose you found no great difficulty in carrying that resolution into effect.”

“ Did not I, though ? I have heard people talk of being alone in London—solitude in a city, as some absurd jackass of a poet has termed it—but I never could realise the situation. Why, the very streets are burning with life ; and I defy you to remain shut up all day, like a starling in a cage, without making an effort to get out. You may get through a few hours in the morning passably well, with the aid of a book and a cigar ; but you must stroll down to your club of an afternoon just to hear the news of the day ; and once there, you are sure to fall in with some rattling fellows who are making up a pleasure-party, or devising some enjoyable lark. I never could resist that sort of

temptation, Sinclair ; and the consequence is, that I am now in disgrace for having assisted in as capital a hoax as was ever perpetrated."

"I can well believe it, Attie, for you have always shown a decided turn for practical jokes. I hope you have not been so imprudent as to get into a serious scrape."

"Trust me for that !" replied Faunce. "I know as well as most men how to keep within the limits that wit and humour prescribe. But you shall hear. I think you know Sam Morley ?"

"Do you mean the queer clever fellow who can imitate to the life every actor on the stage, and who boasts that he brought out a tragedy before he was sixteen ?"

"The same. Well, it so happened that I fell in with Sam one morning lately ; and the day being very fine, we thought it would be a good plan to make up an aquatic party, and dine afterwards at Thames Ditton. I think you will allow there could be no great harm in that. We had no difficulty in finding recruits ; so some eight of us embarked on the river, and we had excellent fun, landing occasionally near some modest public-house to satisfy ourselves of the excellence of Hanbury & Co.'s Entire. Then we had a stroll through the grounds of Hampton Court, and finally dropped down to Thames Ditton, where we had ordered dinner to be ready at six. Every room in the hotel having been bespoke, there was not much accommodation for chance visitors ; and two men, who were acquainted

with some of our party, proposed to join us. This we did not relish, for the addition of a stranger to a social set, in the midst of their merriment, is utterly destructive of sport ; but in order to avoid the appearance of rudeness, the gentlemen were informed that we should have been most happy to have accommodated them, but for the fact that one of our party was an illustrious stranger of so exalted a rank that we durst not take such a liberty."

"An ingenious device ! and pray to what existing potentate was the hint intended to refer ? "

"Why, I believe the original idea was to start a Prince of Hohenzollern Sigmaringen. But by the time dinner was over, and we had taken a few glasses of claret, a more sublime conception dawned upon our minds, and Sam Morley was, by universal acclamation, recognised as the Conde de Montemolino ! You can conceive no richer scene than Sam's assumption of the dignity ! He is swarthy enough to pass any day for a Spaniard ; but he contrived somehow to make himself look ten years older than he is, moved as if the gout were lodged in every joint of his limbs, and put on an air of supreme but most imbecile condescension. And then, his broken English !—ye gods, it would have done credit to Houndsditch ! "

"And for whose benefit, pray, was this dramatic performance intended ? "

"At first it was a mere joke among ourselves ; but Sam comported himself so inimitably that we really thought it a pity to let the fun rest there ; so we had

in the strangers, merely cautioning them against making any political allusions, or using any title of courtesy, as the distinguished personage upon whom we were attending desired to remain incognito. They fell into the trap—indeed it was impossible it could be otherwise, for Sam's Royal Exile was the most splendid piece of acting I ever beheld. You should have heard his pent-up sigh when mention was made of the Escorial !

“The waiters, observing the extraordinary homage that we paid to our august companion, set the rumour flying through the house ; and presently the hotel-keeper made his appearance, most correctly figged out, and, with an obeisance that would have done credit to a court chamberlain, ventured to express a hope that we had found everything to our liking. It was now time for us to start in order to catch the train at the station, so we inquired whether a fly could be procured, as one of our party was too infirm to walk so far. The master of the house smiled significantly, and replied that he had already made due provision ; and, sure enough, in a minute or two, a handsome barouche drove up to the door, and the carriage of his Excellency was announced. Leaning on my arm, the Royal invalid tottered down stairs, and passed into his equipage through a double line of bare-headed attendants, who bent before him with as much veneration as if he had been the Great Mogul !”

“If that was all that took place,” said I, “the freak was a very harmless one.”

“Ay, but it did not terminate there,” replied Attie. “You see, by this time, Sam Morley had got a good deal of claret on board—in fact, was so drunk that, do what we might, it was impossible to persuade him that he was not actually Don Carlos! Christopher Sly was not more convinced of the reality of his metamorphosis. To do him justice, he was remarkably generous, for he bestowed upon most of us large estates—veritable *châteaux en Espagne*—as the reward of our fidelity; and me he elevated to the rank of a grandee, under the title of Marquis de los Cabanos. Just as we arrived at the station, the train came up. It was an excursion one, and very crowded; so, as we could not obtain a carriage for ourselves, we were forced to get into a huge vehicle of many compartments, wherein were some dozen of citizens, male and female, returning from the country, bearing with them sylvan spoils in the shape of branches of flowering lilac and laburnum, and all manner of abominable nosegays.

“The Don got wedged with difficulty between two buxom damsels, upon whom, to their infinite amazement, he commenced to lavish a series of polyglot compliments; whereupon a young fellow, who evidently was an adorer of one of the Dulcineas, thought it incumbent on him to wax jealous, and muttered something about punching the head of the ugly foreign rascal. With the view, I suppose, of preventing a row, one of our party whispered to the irate Cockney that the person whom he threatened to chastise was

no other than the rightful monarch of Spain ! In one instant the secret went buzzing through the car. As you must have remarked, English tradespeople, though they affect to be very independent, are in reality abject worshippers of title ; and the intimation that they were actually sitting in the same railway carriage with a Royal Highness who had pretensions to be an absolute king, filled the hearts of the company with awe. It was beautiful to mark the suavity with which the Don received their silent homage, no whit relaxing from his attentions to the blushing maidens of Cheapside, who at length, fairly captured by his fascinations, proffered him flowers, which the gallant Spaniard pressed significantly to his heart !

“ That was the signal for a floral ovation that even Grisi might have envied ; for every woman in the car insisted on presenting her nosegay to the Don, who might next morning have rigged out a bower from the multitude of the votive offerings. Fortunately we soon reached the station at Waterloo Bridge, but even there we had to pay the penalty of our greatness ; for the news that a prince was in the train spread like wildfire through the crowd that swarmed on the platform, and so intense was the curiosity to behold the distinguished stranger, that we had the utmost difficulty in forcing our way to a cab. Let no one henceforward tax Royal personages with ingratitude ! Montemolino, before entering the humble conveyance, raised his hat, and made a most graceful bow to the multitude ; whereat they cheered so vociferously that he

obviously meditated addressing them, for the purpose of explaining in a few sentences the nature of his rights to the crown of Spain—an intention which we ruthlessly cut short by bundling him into the cab, where he uttered a prayer to San Iago, and presently fell fast asleep. That's what I call a first-rate hoax, successful from the beginning to the end."

"Certainly," said I, "it is quite as good as any of those recorded by Gilbert Gurney. But in all this I can see nothing to rouse the anger of Mr Osborne."

"Ah, the most foolish part of the story is yet to come," replied Faunce. "Our first business was to get Sam Morley home; and then, the night being still young, two or three of us went to get a bit of supper. You may be sure we were in high glee, for the jest had tickled us extremely, and we amused ourselves by speculating on the rumours which were sure to be spread abroad in the course of the next morning. Suddenly it occurred to me—I suppose through the diabolical suggestion of some champagne-begotten imp of darkness—that there was yet time enough to get an account of Montemolino's visit to Hampton Court and Thames Ditton, as also of his enthusiastic reception by the populace, inserted in the morning papers; so we called for pen and ink, and I drew up a screaming account of the expedition, interlarded with sundry dark political hints, which I intended for the special refectation of the lads in the Foreign Office."

"I recollect reading the paragraph," said I, "which struck me as very singular; the French papers having

just announced that Don Carlos was in the south of France."

"Therein lay the cream of the after-jest!" cried Attie. "I was perfectly well aware of that fact; and I chuckled over the notion of bamboozling the whole diplomatic body, and setting them to work out the discovery of a mare's nest. For aught I could tell, the announcement might have created a sensation only inferior to the news of the escape from Elba!"

"Attie—you are incorrigible! Even now I can see that you feel no real contrition for having promulgated a mischievous and most unjustifiable deception."

"Perhaps, Sinclair, in that respect I am not worse than some of my neighbours. Galvanism is coming into fashion; and if a touch of it can do good to individuals in a state of chronic torpidity, it must likewise have a wholesome stimulating effect on the sluggish body politic. I warrant now that the paragraph in question gave occupation to some dozens of pens that otherwise would have been perfectly idle."

"An ingenious defence, I must admit, for the propagation of *canards*! But tell your story in your own way."

"Well; the paragraph being concocted, and highly approved of by my jovial friends, the next consideration was how we were to get it inserted. There it was that my real blundering commenced. I happened to know personally the sub-editor of *our* paper—I need not mention his name—whose duty it was to

take in late communications ; and I was stupid enough to go personally to the office, and put the manuscript into his hands. He, as a matter of course, suspected no trick, and sent it to press. On the following morning, the Montemolino movement was ringing through the town ; and the evening papers, alluding to the circumstance, were pleased to express grave doubts as to the authenticity of the statement, though they were compelled to admit that there was a general rumour to the effect that Don Carlos had been seen in London and its environs. My error lay in making the account too authoritative and special ; whereas, had I merely rested it upon rumour, I should have been safe enough. Uncle Osborne, who is watchful as a dragon for the interests of his paper, saw that obnoxious paragraph, and immediately instituted inquiry. Of course, the authorship was traced to me. If I had been a thief arraigned at the Old Bailey, the procedure could not have been more formal. Having admitted my responsibility, I was asked to give up my authority ; which question, as you must see, left me no alternative, as a man of honour. I therefore confessed to the hoax, and threw myself upon the mercy of the court. My uncle, as you know, is by no means devoid of humour, but I could not persuade him to regard this little escapade of mine as an irresistible impulse of genius, and I received such a wiggling as sorely tried my temper. The upshot was, that, in spite of my most abject apologies, he fell back upon the precedent established by his favourite Laban, and sentenced me to six

months' additional celibacy. I was fain to acquiesce in his terms, for at first he manifested a strong inclination to have done with me altogether."

"There can be no doubt," said I, "that you acted very foolishly, Attie, in pushing the joke so far; still I think the punishment is too heavy for the offence, and I feel quite convinced that Mr Osborne will adopt that view on a more calm consideration of the circumstances."

"Ah! but you don't know my uncle so well as I do. He can be as stiff as a poker when he pleases; and he is one of the old City school who pique themselves on keeping their word, though that word may have been rashly spoken. My best hope is that he may discover, as he is pretty sure to do, that in punishing me he is inflicting unmerited pain on Janey; for I know that the dear girl loves me too well to be as blithe and merry as is her wont, so long as her good-for-nothing cousin is in disgrace. And it's very hard that my sins should be visited with so much severity! If uncle Osborne could be brought to consider the matter dispassionately, he must see that no good purpose can be served by those provoking delays and arbitrary restrictions. If I had been allowed to go to the villa as before, I never should have been landed in this scrape; and, after all, there was no great harm in it. Do, Sinclair, I beseech you, see my uncle, and if possible persuade him to have done with this nonsense, and let the marriage take place as soon as may be. I know that he has a high regard for you; and I really

think you are bound to do me this service, for you have been so often exhibited to me as a model of propriety, that I had, according to the usage of the world, a fair right to detest you !”

“ I thank you for your abstinence !” said I. “ But you never could have done anything to make me cease from liking you, Attie. Well, you coaxing young scapegrace, I’ll do for you what I can ; but you must give me power potential to promise anything in the way of reformation in your name, and you must pledge me your word to perform it.”

“ Signior Bassanio,” began Attie, “ hear me ! If I do not put on a sober habit, talk with respect, and swear but now and then——”

“ Nay,” said I ; “ don’t come Gratiano over me, else I shall retort on you with Shylock’s quip, ‘ Repair thy wit, good youth, or it will fall to cureless ruin !’ I have good hope that Mr Osborne will relent ; for, as you say truly enough, this suspense is very hard upon his daughter ; and, if he insists on postponing the event until you are perfectly immaculate, banishing you all the while from the villa, I fear he will be treading in the footsteps rather of Jephthah than of Laban.”

“ O wise young judge, how I do honour thee !” cried Attie. “ My own sentiments exactly — only expressed with more terseness and propriety ! Tell him, I beseech you, that his penitent nephew, Arthur Faunce, having seriously meditated on his former backslidings, and more particularly upon the late

atrocious hoax into participation in which he was betrayed—a hoax so serious that, if successful, it might have awakened war in Europe, and caused a frightful fall in the Three per cents—now approaches him, overwhelmed by a feeling of the most profound remorse——”

“Get away!” said I. “I shall simply tell him that, in my opinion, the only conceivable plan for keeping you out of mischief is to get you married as soon as possible.”

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH SOME OF THE CHARACTERS ARE WITHDRAWN.

As I had anticipated, I did not find Mr Osborne inexorable. Although he had deemed it his duty to administer a severe rebuke to his nephew, and was really provoked by the liberty which had been taken with his paper, he was by no means insensible to the merits of the joke. In fact, as we walked through the gardens, he chuckled over the narrative which I gave him as nearly as possible in the language of Faunce, with a zest which convinced me that, in his younger days, he would have thought it anything but a sin to aid in mystifying the public. Drawing from the resources of his memory, he instanced many cases in which the press, though deviating from the truth, had aided the national cause ; and as those revelations were not spiced by any sprinkling of censure, it was evident to me that my old friend and employer saw no great harm in stretching a point when party considerations rendered such elasticity advisable.

But though willing enough to receive Faunce once

more into favour, I could see that he was still reluctant to give his consent to an immediate marriage. That was not, I apprehend, a feeling peculiar to himself, but one which influences more or less the conduct of all who find themselves in the like position. The marriage of a sole daughter, even though the match may be altogether unexceptionable, is a great trial to a fond father, partaking almost of the nature of a sacrifice. It involves the withdrawal from his care and presence of the one object upon whom his dearest affections are centred—the abstraction of the roseate light that makes the evening of life so beautiful, and compensates for the loss of the more fervid glories and dazzling glare of its meridian. In regard to their domestic arrangements, old men are intensely conservative. Though aware that changes are inevitable, they are invariably desirous to postpone them to the last possible moment ; and they never seem to suspect that, in doing so, they are far more influenced by selfish motives than by regard for the happiness of their children.

I had, however, an important advantage in pleading Attie's cause. Mr Osborne had admitted that he now looked upon the marriage as a settled thing, having ascertained that the affections of his daughter were very deeply engaged ; and that even had he been inclined personally to discourage Faunce's pretensions, he did not consider himself entitled to interpose a negative. The way being thus far cleared, I was able to insist with more effect upon the argument, that it

really was injudicious, to say the least of it, to keep Faunce in a state of suspense which, considering his want of occupation, might draw him into further irregularities.

“It is a maxim of your own, sir,” I said, “that when a man has once made up his mind to do anything, the sooner he goes through with it the better. I am sure you cannot approve of long engagements, such as are often made by young people whose circumstances render immediate matrimony out of the question. I have known many instances of the kind, and I am sorry to say that, in most of them, the consequence has been that the men have continued to live as if no engagement had taken place, denying themselves no indulgence, and submitting to no restraint. Such conduct deserves execration, but it is so common that we cannot overlook it as a fact; and society, judging in such matters according to the fantastic rule of its own code of morals, tolerates in men so situated a degree of licence which it does not accord to the husband. Nay, it even recognises a distinction between an engagement proper and an engagement indefinite, regarding the latter as more or less partaking of the character of a contingency.”

“Nay, that’s true enough,” replied Mr Osborne. “I am quite as much opposed to long engagements as you can be, Sinclair; and I see the drift of your argument perfectly. You may be sure that I have thought over the subject in all its bearings; and if I have not been able to make up my mind, it is because the

future welfare of my own dear child is more precious to me than anything under heaven. Now don't say anything more about it. Tell Attie that he may come here as usual; on the condition, however, that he is to bridle his inventive faculties, avoid the company of exalted personages, and abstain from pilgrimages to Thames Ditton."

"I think I can answer for his abstinence," said I. "And now, Mr Osborne, in relation to my own affairs—I have but to thank you most cordially for the uniform kindness you have shown to me throughout our brief connection."

"You are under no obligation to me, my dear lad!" replied Osborne. "I was on the look-out for a man to do a certain kind of work when accident threw you in my way. I believed you were capable of doing it, and that it would be a much better occupation for you—more creditable and more lucrative—than a desk in some public office, which is all you could have aspired to, had Sir George Smoothly really felt for you the interest he professed. But he is an arrant humbug! That conviction, I am glad to know, is now entertained by his constituents; and at the next general election he will be bowled down like a nine-pin, and vanish from the political world. Mark my words—the reign of plausibility is wellnigh over! Hypocritical government is abhorrent to the downright English instinct that loathes and repudiates imposture."

"At least, sir, you deserve my thanks for having opened my eyes to the true character of the man."

"Oh, you would have made that discovery fast

enough without any assistance from me! But I am really sorry to lose you, Sinclair. I feel very much as a Roman *lanista* might have done in parting with a pet gladiator."

"I trust that I bear my sword from the arena without dishonour."

"Unquestionably; though you have no scars to display as the tokens of your prowess. But you will pardon me for making one observation. When we last met, I understood you to say that, notwithstanding your accession of fortune, you had no thoughts of relinquishing your engagement. That seemed to me a very wise resolution; but it appears that you have since altered your mind. Now, I don't want to press you for your reasons—in fact, have no right to do so—but it would be a satisfaction to me to feel assured that in making the change you have maturely considered whether it is likely to prove conducive to your happiness. I say this, because if you entertain literary aspirations of a more ambitious kind, it may be in my power to offer you some assistance."

"Many thanks, Mr Osborne. But, without pledging myself to perpetual abstinence, I have done with practical literature for the present. The truth is, that for some time past I have been so much engrossed by matters of a personal nature, that I cannot give that undivided attention to journalism which you have a right to require. It is my intention soon to return to Scotland; but more than this, under existing circumstances, I cannot with propriety divulge."

"You have said quite enough, Sinclair, to satisfy

me," replied Mr Osborne. "Well, don't forget, at any rate, to send me cards. What!—blushing? Nay, nay, my good boy, you must forgive the old gentleman his joke, more especially as you have just been asking his indulgence for one of a more serious description! Quite right—marry and retire! It is amazing with what ardour a man returns to work after two years of a cottage and honeysuckles! But I hear the gong for lunch. Let us pledge each other—not, I hope, for the last time—in a glass of particular madeira."

As I cannot lay claim to the privilege of the novelist or dramatic author, who usually preserve intact their staff of characters to the last, even though their function has been exhausted, in order that they may appear in the grand tableau with which the performance concludes, I shall now ask the reader to dispense with the further attendance of Mr Osborne and of Attie Faunce. It is not my duty to chronicle the nuptials that took place some two months afterwards, Attie having by that time completely re-established himself in the favour of his uncle; still less to be communicative as to the particulars of his subsequent career. Attie Faunce is no figment, but a gentleman of real flesh and blood, though he must be sought for in the columns of the Directory under a different name; and heaven forbid that I should interfere with the publication of his autobiography, if he has the courage and perseverance to commit his memorabilia to paper!

But good, dear, kind Mr Osborne—my early friend

and patron—of him at least I may be permitted to say a final word. In the fulness of his years, but before the sturdy frame was bowed by decrepitude or the acute intellect impaired, he was taken to his rest ; and though the phantom of Death is so familiar to us that the stroke of his dart, when we see it fall, causes but a momentary shudder, and the affliction that we feel for the loss of our departed friends is softened into a gentle memory ere yet the first daisies have withered on their graves—their images, engraved on our hearts, are preserved from oblivion, until we likewise receive the summons to pass from time into eternity. And, indeed, Mr Osborne was a man not likely to be forgotten by any who had passed even a single hour in his company ; for he possessed, in a remarkable degree, the faculty of discerning motives, of separating the true from the factitious, and of detecting hypocrisy, no matter how artfully disguised. Yet this singular power did not, as might have been the case with an inferior nature, engender a suspicious habit. To the man in whom he had once reposed his trust, he was as open as day ; but he trusted not on the strength of mere asseveration alone. Plausibility, especially of that kind which it seems to be the fashion for the modern race of statesmen to assume, he regarded with extreme abhorrence,—maintaining always that a breach of good faith, either with the public or with a political party, was the most serious crime that a Minister could commit, and certain in the long-run to lead to his degradation and disgrace. Applying

the same principle to the transactions of private life, he deplored the mad precipitation with which mercantile affairs are now too commonly conducted, the rash speculations fostered by an inordinate desire for gain, and the consequent decay of that high feeling of integrity which was once the proud characteristic of the British merchant. Belonging, and proud to belong, to the middle class of society, he was almost nervously jealous lest the prevalent tone of its morals should become deteriorated or corrupted ; for, though honouring the aristocracy as an institution, he was fully impressed with the conviction that the stability of the empire must for the future depend upon the prudence, wisdom, and temperance of that mighty untitled order, the varied interests of which are represented in the House of Commons. Therefore he dreaded, more perhaps than anything else, the possible spread of democracy, which he ever maintained to be far more hostile and destructive to the wellbeing of a nation than the existence of feudal privileges, or the exercise of irresponsible power ; and he held that there could be no worse enemy to the commonwealth than the man who, for party considerations or for the sake of gratifying his own wretched ambition, tampered with the constitution of his country.

Farewell, old friend ! Many there are around me yet whom I love, respect, and honour ; but never have I known a kinder heart or a wiser head than thine !

CHAPTER XVI.

LUMLEY'S AMATORY EXPERIENCES.

AFTER what had taken place, I felt embarrassed at the thought of meeting Lumley; for although no further explanations were now required, or indeed were likely to be made, we stood towards each other in rather an anomalous position. After giving due weight to all that Carlton had urged regarding the generosity and so forth that had been exhibited by our mutual friend, I could not account for his extreme facility in giving way, so soon as he ascertained that there was a rival in the field.

“Surely,” thought I, “this man’s love, if he really did entertain such a feeling, must have been of the weakest and most evanescent kind, else he never would have foregone the splendid advantages which his position and fortune secured to him, without at least hazarding a refusal!” and I began, in spite of myself, to entertain a suspicion that, throughout the whole affair, Lumley had been actuated rather by caprice than by any consistent motive.

I now know that I was wrong in thinking so, but lovers seldom reason calmly. I did not reflect that Lumley, by abstaining from paying his addresses to Mary Beaton while she was universally reputed to be an heiress, had in some measure lessened his right to advance a subsequent claim. At all events he had lost an opportunity ; for a proposal *now* would have been construed by the malicious world into an act of chivalrous condescension, creditable perhaps to the gentleman, but not very flattering to the lady. Then again I committed a serious error in estimating the nature of Lumley's attachment by the vehemence of my own. He was an older man than I was, had seen much more of the world, and had outlived the period when passion is at its highest flow. Advancing years generate a philosophic habit even where the affections are concerned. Pericles may love well and faithfully, but he loves not with the ardour of Alcibiades ; for he has ceased to be a dreamer and an enthusiast, and he will not permit one sole engrossing thought to make a monopoly of his mind. I say not that the passion of Alcibiades is to be preferred to the constancy of Pericles. Far from it ! But Pericles could resign without a struggle what Alcibiades would risk his life to obtain.

Heaven forbid that I should liken myself in any way to "the curled son of Clinias," who, with all his energy and accomplishments, was anything but a reputable character ! Neither is it within the compass of ingenuity to construct even a tolerable parallelism

between Lumley the *insouciant*, and Pericles the wise administrator. All I mean to say is, that the experienced senior feels, thinks, and acts differently from the more impulsive junior, and is capable of making sacrifices which to the other seem absolutely impossible.

But, whatever interpretation I might put upon his conduct, I could not evade the conviction that I was really under a deep obligation to Lumley ; and I felt assured that, after another meeting, all traces of embarrassment would disappear. So, as I had for the present plenty of leisure—indeed, more than was altogether agreeable, considering the uncertainty that still hung over me—I thought it best to lose no time in effecting so desirable an object, and accordingly intimated to Carlton my wish that we should at once avail ourselves of Lumley's proffered hospitality. Carlton, who, I believe, was more annoyed than he liked to show by the reminiscence of his somewhat incautious revelations, caught eagerly at the proposal ; and a day or so afterwards we repaired by appointment to Lumley's quarters in Park Street.

I make no doubt that it must be a delightful thing to be lodged in a palace surrounded by the appurtenances of state ; but for comfort, elegance, and luxury combined, commend me to the house of a London bachelor of cultivated taste and ample fortune. There are not many such, I know, for the clubs have sadly lessened the number of those exquisite Apician domiciles ; still, there do exist a few, and among these

Lumley's was acknowledged to be the most perfect of its kind. The study, with its small but costly library, and one or two masterpieces of Venetian art, was indeed liable to this objection, that it was far too seductively arranged to serve its ostensible purpose. At all events, I should have found it very difficult to pursue any sort of serious study, surrounded by so many objects of almost irresistible attraction. Our thoughts are apt enough at any time to wander, without being exposed to special temptation ; and sure I am that, had John Bunyan been quartered in a palace instead of being shut up in Bedford jail, he never could have conceived or described the glories of the Heavenly City.

There was no company beyond ourselves ; and we sat down to a dainty repast at a round table, in the centre of which was that admirable invention of a former age which modern stupidity has too generally discarded—a dumb waiter. Lumley was in high spirits, which gradually extended their influence to both Carlton and myself ; so that, before the business of eating was over, the real object of the visit was accomplished, and we felt altogether at our ease. There never was a better Amphytrion than Lumley. His wit sparkled as brightly as the champagne, and the flavour of the *entrées* did not suffer from the additional zest of his anecdotes.

After the servants had withdrawn, the conversation flowed on unimpeded, through general topics at first, but presently we approached more familiar themes ; and Lumley, somewhat to my surprise, made allusion,

though in the most delicate manner, to our position as being both of us men engaged and committed to matrimony. I believe he did this from deliberation, with the view of satisfying me that, whatever his feelings might have been, he had entirely succeeded in mastering them ; and certainly there was nothing of chagrin or disappointment in his tone.

“ I regard you both,” said he, “ as fortunate fellows in being able to marry at a reasonably early period of life. If a man does not happen to hit the exact medium, marriage is rather a questionable step. Mere boys make the worst of husbands. They don’t know their own minds, and they cannot control their tempers, or those of the unhappy girls they have chosen ; and as years roll on, the indifference that succeeds to love often changes into positive aversion. On the other hand, if a man postpones the event too long, he is apt to become confirmed in his bachelor habits ; and if that mode of life is not actually distasteful to him, he is reluctant to try the perilous experiment of a change.”

“ It is no wonder if you should feel some such reluctance,” said Carlton. “ The possession of such a snugger as this is a real impediment to marriage.”

“ Ah, well ! ” said Lumley, “ that is one view certainly ; and, generally speaking, there may be some truth in what you say. But I demur to the notion that a single man ought to practise asceticism. I am haunted by a taste ; and as I have no lack of money, why should I hesitate to gratify it ? I won’t deny that I am fond of pictures, books, good living, wine, and

luxury ; and were it not for a confounded feeling of satiety that sometimes comes over me, I think I should be tolerably contented."

"An admission," said I, "which proves that you have stretched the tether of philosophy to the utmost ; for when did you ever meet with the man who professed to be entirely contented ?"

"I, at least, have never stumbled on such a phenomenon," replied Lumley. "But do not let us run away from the subject. In any case I cannot plead bachelor habits as an excuse for remaining single. I am simply a veteran trout who has been so often pricked in the mouth that he will not rise to any lure."

"I wish you would favour us neophytes with some account of your experiences," said Carlton.

"*A quoi bon, mon cher ?*" replied Lumley. "Long ago enlisted by that smart serjeant Cupid, you are about to join the honourable company of Hymen. Why should I trouble you with the history of my misadventures ?"

"If for nothing else, at least to explain to us how it happens that the gay and gallant Lumley has never entered the service ?"

"Nay, if you seriously wish to hear the narrative of my woes, I don't care if I inflict some part of my tediousness upon you. Observe, however, I hold myself in no way responsible if the effect of my discourse should be to throw both of you into a magnetic trance. So, pray, fill your glasses ; and let the dumb-waiter revolve whilst I give utterance to my sorrows.

“No joyful peal of bells, such as rings on the birth of an heir, greeted me when I first opened my eyes in this world. No steer was roasted, no barrels were tapped in honour of that auspicious event. Esau had preceded Jacob. My elder brother Percy had, some three years before, been exhibited to the admiring and thirsty tenantry as their future landlord.

“Although I am a stickler for the maintenance of the law of primogeniture, I must needs admit that the situation of a younger son in a wealthy family is a trying one. He is brought up in the midst of luxury, perhaps of splendour, and yet is told, so soon as he is capable of receiving distinct impressions, that the things which he is allowed in the mean time to taste and enjoy cannot permanently be his. He is desired to keep in mind that the day will arrive when he must go forth an exile from the halls of his fathers to conquer fortune for himself, carrying with him slight provision for the future beyond that share of energy and intellect with which he has been gifted, and which he is exhorted to improve. Under such circumstances, clearly the best thing that can be done for the lad is to quarter him out as early as possible, so that he may *feel* betimes that he has to work his own way, a lesson not easily acquired in the midst of every indulgence. My excellent father, however, had nothing of the Roman in him, and was far too fond of his children to banish them even for their good. So I was brought up as if I were to be a gentleman at large; was early trained to country sports, for which I had a peculiar

aptitude ; studied after a kind of fashion under the superintendence of a cultivated tutor, who was too much of a scholar to be a pedant ; and when I was sent to the university, received an allowance that might have satisfied the heir to a peerage. The consequence was that I became somewhat dissipated, ran into debt, and failed in materially advancing the classical reputation of my college.

“ At length the time arrived when the grand question of a future career had to be settled in a family divan. I was assured of a good living if I would agree to take orders ; but I was far too conscientious to practise such base hypocrisy. A commission in the Guards would have suited me exactly ; but that arm of the service was deemed too expensive, and I recoiled from the prospect of country quarters and long years of colonial expatriation. The advantages of the legal profession were then elaborately discussed. I was desired to look forward to the woolsack looming in the distance ; but my eyesight was weak, and I failed to obtain even a glimpse of that very comfortable Pisgah. Had I seen it ever so clearly, I do not believe that I could have mustered sufficient courage to force my way through the intervening desert, and face the gorgons and chimeras that haunt the Blackstonian Sahara. Would I go into Parliament ? If so, in a year or two a seat would probably be vacant, which family influence might secure for me ; and it was not unreasonable to expect that I might be able to extract a plum from the public pudding. With this latter proposal I closed,

the rather because it afforded me a temporary respite ; and I resolved in the meanwhile to observe life and study diplomacy at Paris and Vienna.

“ While I was abroad I received the mournful intelligence of the death of the best of fathers ; and also a communication from the family solicitors, apprising me that eight thousand pounds was all I had to depend on. Of that sum very nearly a third was forestalled by debts I had contracted, so that I had to solve the difficult problem of maintaining myself like a gentleman on an income of two hundred a-year. I had also the mortification to learn that the seat I expected to occupy had been appropriated by a monster manufacturer, whose appetite for bacon was so enormous, that, for several days previous to the election, the price of a fitch was considerably above thirty guineas. So there was an end to my hopes of parliamentary distinction and office.

“ My brother Percy and I were on tolerable fraternal terms, but we had not much community of sentiment. He was reserved, cautious, and calculating, with decided notions of thrift, bordering on the verge of avarice ; whereas I was an outspoken, improvident fellow, partaking much more of the nature of the butterfly than of the bee. Since then, time has wrought a mighty alteration. I am now feelingly alive to the charm of a large balance at my banker’s ; and in a few years I expect to attain to the reputation of a screw.

“ Percy, I make no doubt, would have cheerfully presented me, now and then, with a cheque for a hun-

dred pounds, if I had asked him for such a favour ; for he set much store on his dignity as head of the house, and was fond of delivering a lecture, for which there can be no better opportunity than a proposal for a pecuniary advance. But I did not choose to lay myself under any such obligation, and he was not generous enough, though he knew my straitened circumstances, to make a spontaneous offer of an annual allowance. So I had to live as I best could upon a mere pittance, and practise economy ; in which I succeeded so far that I did not annually expend much more than twice the amount of my income.

“ If I had been prudent, I should have gone into chambers and read ; but I liked society, and determined to enjoy it so long as that was within my power. I possessed the art of making myself agreeable, and had the *entrée* to all the best houses. I was patronised by dowagers who had ceased to be shepherdesses of a flock ; but mammas, who were anxiously watching the matrimonial market with the view to disposal of their daughters, were by no means so affable or kind. In me they recognised that most equivocal of all characters, a detrimental—useful perhaps occasionally as a foil, but never to be encouraged beyond a certain point, and always to be regarded with suspicion. Regular fortune-hunters, who are pretty well known by head-mark, were not so obnoxious to those ladies as were young men of sense and acquirements. They considered that their undowered daughters were safe from the advances of the one class, but they dreaded lest

their affections might be entangled by the assiduities of the other.

“Of the existence and extent of this prejudice I soon received a palpable proof. Lady Letitia Castleton, a woman of high birth and unblemished character, but of very contracted fortune, had an only daughter, Ida, who was acknowledged to be the *belle* of the season. A more fairy-like creature never flitted through the dance ; and she was, I verily believe, as amiable as she was charming. Be that as it may, I fell desperately in love with Ida, and made no concealment of my passion. Wherever she went, there was I, constant as her shadow ; and, of course, before long my attentions became the subject of remark.

“Lady Letitia, who was as clever a woman as ever brought an heir-apparent to book, was horribly annoyed by my behaviour, but she was far too experienced to exhibit in presence of the public any symptom of chagrin. On the contrary, her deportment towards me was ineffably seraphic, and you would have thought that she was fully prepared to bestow on me her maternal benediction. But one day I was summoned to her boudoir.

“ ‘Mr Lumley,’ said her ladyship, ‘you are a very young man, and therefore privileged to be foolish ; but you have no right to make your folly the cause of misery to others. You are in love with Ida, and for that I do not blame you, because possibly you cannot help it ; but I shall not allow you to ruin the prospects of my child. I shall not go through the ceremony of

asking you what your intentions are, for I do not suppose you have any. Neither you nor Ida have any fortune, and therefore matrimony is wholly out of the question. Under these circumstances I shall perform a mother's duty, and request you to discontinue your visits.'

"What could I say in reply? A romantic tirade about love and broken hearts would have been utterly thrown away upon that Spartan lady, who was clearly mistress of the situation; so there was nothing for it but to accept the rebuke, express^{*} contrition for my folly, and depart. So ended my first serious love-affair. Lady Letitia Castleton vindicated her reputation for diplomacy; for a few months afterwards Ida was decked with the orange wreath, and gave her hand to an Indian gentleman of enormous wealth and dingy complexion, the reputed offspring of a Begum.

"It would be tedious to continue the chronicle of my disappointments. I had an unfortunate propensity for falling in love, but never made what the world would have called a prudent or judicious selection; consequently I began to acquire notoriety as an adept in the art of flirting; and, to say the truth, I had worked rather hard for the character. The affections are not to be played with. If a man is forced to transfer them frequently—and I maintain that there may be such coercion without innate fickleness on his part—they lose their edge. Constancy once abandoned, he submits to change as a matter of imperious necessity, and ends by regarding it as something scarce-

ly short of a positive gratification. That is my theory of flirting, which I hold to be the inevitable product of a highly artificial but unwholesome form of society. Wisdom is of slow growth, but it will make its way, like the ivy which spreads over even the barest wall; and I at last began to feel thoroughly disgusted and ashamed at leading a life so absolutely useless and discreditable. Modern wiseacres are fond of sneering at the Crusades—upon my soul, I think that a new crusade, if we could manage to get up a respectable one, would be of infinite service, by clearing off some thousands of younger sons who can find no proper vent for their energies in this overstocked country of competition.

“All sorts of wild schemes floated across my brain. I would go to Canada and aid in the extermination of the primeval forests—I would devote myself to the exploration of the sources of the Nile or the Niger—I would take service with some native Indian prince, and become the founder of a new dynasty—I would set sail for Otaheite, and propose to Queen Pomarre! You laugh at this confession! Very good; but please remember that wiser fellows than I am have indulged in similar hallucinations.

“I was saved the trouble of carrying into execution any of these delectable designs. My brother Percy, who was too timorous to hunt, and who never trusted himself on the back of a thoroughbred, was thrown from a stumbling cob, and died of concussion of the brain. His thoughts had, for some time previously,

been directed to the subject of matrimony; but as he was a tempting object for maternal pursuit, he was exceeding wary, and departed this life without having found courage enough to throw the handkerchief. I succeeded to the family estates, and found myself a wealthy man.

“Believe me when I say that I felt no exultation at the change. I had become so used to a listless and indolent way of living that I felt it rather a nuisance than otherwise to be compelled to exert myself in attending to the management of my estate, and the numerous business details that were constantly brought under my notice. The desire for action, which had taken possession of my mind, passed away with the motive; and it seemed to me a very hard thing that the succession to some ten thousand a-year should entail a vast deal of trouble without materially enhancing my enjoyment. It is my firm belief that a single man, with no debts and an income of five or six hundred, may lead a merrier life than the millionaire, and be ten times more independent. But a truce to such stale reflections! Though true, they are practically useless; for no one will refuse to carry the pack-saddle that Plutus places on his shoulders.

“My good-luck did not interfere with the friendships I had already formed, nor did it lead to any large addition to the circle; for I was a great deal too proud to encourage the advances of men whom I had known during the days of my poverty, but who had then exhibited *hauteur*. But it was astonishing to

observe how vastly I had risen in the estimation of the fair sex ! Jewelled matrons who, but a few months before, had bristled up at my approach, now greeted me with their softest smiles, or assailed me with bewitching banter. All at once it was discovered that I possessed a vein of wit—some even called it genius—quite unusual in an age of commonplace ; that my manner was singularly fascinating ; and that my judgment in matters of taste was infallible. All the former precautions were abandoned, all the barriers removed from my way ; and I now had full licence, nay encouragement, to make love to my heart's content, without any dread of interdiction. I hope I am not a coxcomb, though what I am about to say might justify such an imputation ; but I could not help thinking that several well-tutored young ladies who had once been rather disdainful, would now have listened to me with some attention, even if I had passed the boundaries of ordinary compliment, and meandered into gallantry and courtship. But in succeeding to my poor brother's fortune, I had, somehow or other, acquired a share of his habitual circumspection and restraint ; and, to my own astonishment, I did not feel myself inclined to indulge in my former practice of talking amatory nonsense. When a man becomes fully aware that the words which he may utter in jest are likely to be construed into solemn earnest, he needs not the exhortation of Solomon to bridle and control his tongue.

“ There was no heartlessness in this, for I really had no attachment. Men fall in love readily enough when

they have nothing else to think of, and when the act itself is one of gross imprudence : but when, by some unexpected turn of fortune, they find themselves able to marry, and are actually willing to do so, the chances are that they cannot get up an attachment. A poor fellow, who earns no more than a couple of pounds in the week, is as inflammable as tinder. Give him a few thousands, and he becomes insensible as asbestos. You seem to differ from that opinion—ah, well ! I wish I could convince myself that I am in the wrong. But both of you are fortunate, because you have loved well and truly, from impulse and sympathy, without the dreary necessity to which I then was reduced, of having to force love if I wished to partake of its fruition. Happy rogues ! You are exempted from attaining to the last grand lesson of philosophy, which is this—that the WILL of man has no power whatsoever over the affections, but is a tyrant against whose authority they rebel !

“Wearied with the London life, and being thoroughly convinced that what I sought for was not to be found in the whirl of ceaseless gaiety, I went abroad, taking with me neither courier nor valet. Here, you know, it is incumbent upon a man to maintain some sort of establishment corresponding to his means ; but on the Continent he is entitled to enjoy his freedom ; and even at the present time it is my habit to recreate myself, for a month or so, precisely as I used to do when I was a younger brother, and found it necessary to calculate my bills. Paris, in early spring, is truly delect-

able ; but after that is over, give me the sauntering kind of life that a man can lead on the Rhine, or in some of the quaint minor capitals of Germany.

“ Well, I took up my residence at Weimar ; and there I made the acquaintance of an English lady, a Mrs Lindsay, widow of a general officer, who was compelled for reasons of economy to reside abroad. She had one daughter, a very charming girl, who had been brought up, under her mother’s eye, in the country, and whose mind was purity itself. I am not about to rhapsodise—indeed it is almost painful to me now to recall the memory of the few happy weeks, probably the happiest of my life, that I spent at Weimar. I became very intimate with the Lindsays ; read poetry and sketched with Eleanor ; and, in short, almost before I knew it, fell seriously in love. That girl exercised over me an influence different from any that I had known before. I felt subdued, if not timid, in her presence. I could not have addressed her in the language of compliment or gallantry ; for, like Una, she was so divinely fair, and so spiritually simple, that artifice was abhorrent to her nature, and to deviate from truth in her presence was little short of desecration.

“ I shall cut my story short. Presumptuous fool that I was ! I thought I had gained Miss Lindsay’s affections—alas ! I had only acquired her esteem ! That I learned from her mother, whose sharper sight had detected my attachment, and whose kindly heart prompted her to make the disclosure in order to spare

me the pangs of disappointment. Eleanor was already engaged to a young clergyman, a relative of her own, who held a small curacy in the north of England, but whose straitened circumstances had hitherto delayed the marriage. Thank heaven ! that obstacle was soon afterwards removed.

“That was my last serious matrimonial attempt. It seemed as if fate had predestined that, whether poor or rich, I should be denied the blessings of domestic happiness ; so I have striven to conform to what I believe to be my lot, and have almost made up my mind to be interred as the last of the Lumleys. But a pest upon this egotistical folly ! Here have I, instead of playing the part of a courteous and entertaining host, been seduced into a long-winded confession of my failures and defeats, for which, your patience being exhausted, I have no title whatever to expect, as I certainly shall not crave, your sympathy.”

CHAPTER XVII.

A POLITICAL CRISIS.

THE professional sagacity of Mr Poins had led him to a just conclusion. No sooner was Dobigging apprehended and safely lodged in jail, than Speedwell intimated his readiness, on certain conditions, to bear testimony against his quondam confederate ; and, through his information, the person who had engraved the plate which Flusher refused to execute was traced out. This man at once acknowledged that he had received the commission from the secretary, and produced a draught in his handwriting ; so that the evidence as to the forgery was complete, and Ewins was absolved from the severe ordeal of undergoing an examination in court.

I never saw a man more elated than was my Yankee acquaintance when I communicated the intelligence of his escape. His dread of exposure was less on account of the injury to his character as a man of probity and honour—qualities which, to do him justice, he did not profess to claim in any remarkable degree—than from

a consciousness that he could not escape the imputation of having been thoroughly outwitted by the Jew. I have heard it said that, in a trial of dexterity between Jew and Jesuit, the former invariably has the worse ; but Ewins, in the plenitude of his conceit, had regarded himself as more than a match for Ignatius Loyola, and, therefore, *a fortiori*, able to discomfit the sharpest of the children of the captivity. It would have been a foul blot upon his scutcheon if the news of such a palpable "sell" had reached the jobbers of the Broadway.

"It's up stakes with me now, Squire," said Ewins. "Next month sees me on the other side of the Atlantic, and darn my old mocassins if I'll be in a hurry to cross the salt water again ! The spekilation ha'n't turned out just so good as I expected, but it might have been worse ; anyhow, it's a comfort to walk off without a winkle-hawk in one's character for 'cuteness. I guess if I had been spotted here they'd have thought me small potatoes in the States. Wall—it's a true saying, that a man is never too old to learn ; for, since I came to London, I've had it punched into me that it's jest possible that the Columbian 'coon may be circumvented. So I'll steam back to the old location, make friends of the soft-shell hunkers, and mayhap get put up for President."

"Upon my word, Mr Ewins," said I, "you quite awe me by the extent of your ambition !"

"That's because you believe in the bunkum of a rotten aristocracy," replied Ewins. "What was Jeffer-

son? what was Adams? I guess, by your own rule, *they* hadn't the blood of Macbeth within their veins; and though my father sold wooden nutmegs, and my grandfather was a lumberer, I don't see why I shouldn't take post in the Almanac with any crowned head in this owdacious old Europe! Darn me, but I'd do my best to bring your confounded red-tape Foreign Office to its marrow-bones!"

"Allow me to remind you, my friend, that such anticipations are premature, and, indeed, rather indiscreet, considering that you have not yet received official intimation that your presence can be dispensed with at the trial."

"Drop your shooting-iron, Squire! You won't skear this bear by burning priming. I'm as safe now as if I was at the Salt Licks. There's no two ways about it; and I don't need a yellow cover to notify my dismissal. Rum-ti-iddity! I'm so awfully happy that I could cut didoes on a warming-pan! I say, Squire, let's go and liquor!"

I yielded to his instance, for I had a melancholy foreboding that this was to be my last interview with the representative of the Maormors of Clackmannan; and in effect he disappeared from London on the following morning, carrying with him such spoil as he could extract from the Egyptians of the Stock Exchange. How far he has since advanced in the path of political ambition, I know not; but, if true to himself, there seems no reason for supposing that he may not attain to the very highest dignity. If any

reader should doubt the possibility of this, I beg to refer him to Mr James Parton's Life of the late President Andrew Jackson.

Time was beginning to hang rather heavily on my hands, when I was startled by news that convulsed London, and threw the provinces into a ferment. **THE MINISTRY WAS DEFEATED!** A large section of the Conservative party, indignant at a change of policy which they considered tantamount to a dereliction of principle, had renounced their allegiance to their former leader; and by uniting their strength to that of the Opposition upon a question of some importance, were able to place Ministers in a minority. The defeat was so signal that resignation was the necessary consequence.

Tremendous was the excitement at the clubs, into which honourable members and political aspirants rushed frantically to possess themselves of the last morsel of intelligence, and to learn who had been sent for. Dolorous were the faces of the men who had to go out, and radiant and joyous the countenances of those who expected to come in. The Whigs, elated by their good-luck and the prospect of quarter-day, were as playful as kittens, and poked one another's ribs with shouts of jovial hilarity. The Radicals did not share in their mirth, but held aloof, making no sign — not because they objected to a change, but because they were resolved, before pledging their support, to drive an unconscionable bargain. Here and there might be observed a few patriotic martyrs, not looking, however, as if they greatly coveted the crown;

and amongst these I descried, to my infinite delight, Sir George Smoothly, whose aspect could not have been more lugubrious had he been under sentence to stand in the pillory. I hope I am not vindictive, but I must confess that I relished the spectacle intensely. A good man labouring under misfortune commands our sympathy and respect: we have no such genial feelings to expend on the baffled rogue and sycophant.

But there was one prospect which even the Whigs, who were most likely to benefit by the crisis, could not contemplate without a shudder, and that was a speedy dissolution of Parliament. I do not suppose that any class of men in the kingdom, beyond agents and publicans, regard a general election with favour. It unsettles the minds of all, dislocates trade, awakens slumbering animosities, and is peculiarly injurious to the working classes, because it tends to a cessation of steady labour. It is, while it lasts, like a fever, affecting the whole body politic, and it is followed by the usual stages of lassitude and depression. But in especial to members of Parliament is a general election odious; for not only have they to endure the toil, trouble, fatigue, and anxiety which are the burdens common to all candidates for the public suffrage, but they must affect a generosity, even if they have it not, and reconcile themselves to that most distressing of all exigencies, a heavy drain upon the purse. Moreover, for them there is no such thing as a purely winning game, for they may chance to lose both their seats and their money; whereas, in the most favourable event

they will have to deplore a diminution of their balance with the bankers.

Poor little Popham, whose existence I have noticed more than once, went about almost crying. He had crept in by accident, as second member for a borough, under the wing of a generous colleague, who had defrayed the whole of the expense; and he was on the eve of obtaining a small appointment, suitable to his small capacity, when this horrid *bouleversement* occurred. He had little or no fortune—his patron could not be expected again to carry him into Parliament on his shoulders; and even could he procure readmission, of what avail would be his life, if doomed to wither in the cold shade of opposition? Little Popham had some faults and many weaknesses; but he was an honest creature, and never would have sold himself, as some of his former coadjutors have done, to the highest political bidder.

When the question of a dissolution of Parliament has once been mooted, it becomes emphatically, in the now obsolete sense of the term, *the question*; for some six hundred and fifty-eight honourable gentlemen feel themselves extended on the rack until the definitive sentence is pronounced. In pity to the interesting sufferers, the sentence was not long delayed. There *was* to be a dissolution; and from the moment the announcement was made, the existing House of Commons became a nullity. Nobody had leisure to attend to arrears of business. Scarcely was it possible to muster a House to pass the indispensable votes for

the public service. The whips had lost their authority ; and mandates, once esteemed imperative as ukases, were openly laughed to scorn. Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost—such is the senatorial sentiment, when it is known that the gates of St Stephen's, unlike those of the temple of Janus, are about to be closed.

Down went the senators to their counties and boroughs to give explanations of their past conduct, and to promise largely for the future. Unremitting were the labours of the great central committees, sitting in the Reform and Carlton Clubs, whose function it was to find candidates for every available place, and to pull the strings that gave motion to a numerous horde of puppets. In the midst of this turmoil and confusion I received a note from the Earl of Windermere, requesting to see me upon urgent business.

“ Mr Sinclair,” said his Lordship, “ I trust you will forgive the liberty I take in alluding to private matters ; but I think—that is, I am informed that you are on terms of confidential communication with Mr Richard Beaton ? ”

“ Indeed, my Lord,” I replied, “ the person who gave you that information was egregiously mistaken. Mr Beaton is a man very chary of his confidences, and towards me he has always maintained a marked reserve.”

“ You surprise me ! ” said Lord Windermere. “ I understood—such is the general report—that you were about to be closely connected.”

“Report,” said I, “is always rather hasty in its conclusions, and in this instance it has been so especially ; for, without affecting to misunderstand your Lordship’s allusion, I can assure you that I have never yet addressed Mr Beaton on the subject.”

“Then I have no more to say,” replied Lord Windermere. “Indeed I fear I have been already guilty of a breach of good manners, for which I can only plead as my excuse the prevalence of the report, and my belief that it was really a true one. But it seems you are less fortunate than I had supposed.”

“Nay, my Lord, you must not understand me as having renounced a hope which I certainly long have cherished. I do not deny that I am attached to Miss Beaton ; I merely wish to explain that I am not in her father’s confidence.”

“See now what a thing it is to trust to rumour !” said Lord Windermere. “Here have I unwittingly been playing the part of an inquisitor, and extorting a confession upon a subject of the utmost delicacy ! Well—I trust most earnestly that I may be able to congratulate you hereafter. But to business. Perhaps you can inform me who is Mr Beaton’s confidential adviser ?”

“Mr Poins, the solicitor, has, I believe, a larger share of his confidence than any one else.”

“Poins ! O, I know him well by report. A most respectable man, and, I believe, a stanch Tory.”

“I can vouch for his respectability,” said I ; “as to his political views I know nothing.”

“ Ah ! but politics are everything at the present moment. I am almost certain that he is a Conservative, but I must also know the precise shade of his opinions.”

“ If I might venture a remark, my Lord, I should say that many persons would be rather perplexed if asked to name the party to which they properly belong.”

“ You say the truth, Mr Sinclair ; for the old landmarks have been beaten down, and the old watchwords have fallen into disuse. But this is a matter in which caution is requisite. The fact is, that my son, Ashford, does not intend to offer himself again for the representation of the county, a very excellent substitute being provided in the person of a gentleman with whom you are acquainted, but has set his heart on contesting the borough of B—— in place of Mr Beaton, who, it is presumed, will not enter Parliament again. Now I want to know whether, by any means, Mr Beaton could be persuaded to use the influence he possesses in favour of Ashford, whose abilities, I venture to think, might recommend him to any constituency.”

“ I fear, my Lord, nay, I am certain, that such an attempt would be fruitless. Mr Beaton has abandoned politics, and, you may depend upon it, will positively decline to interfere.”

“ I almost anticipated as much,” said Lord Windermere, “ but I do not like to give up the idea without a trial. Of course, nothing would be expected beyond

such a recommendation as a gentleman might make with perfect propriety ; and though I am well aware that Mr Beaton was a supporter of the late Ministry, I am certain he would prefer Ashford to a declared Radical who it seems is already in the field."

"Lord Windermere," I said, "Mr Beaton, though broken in fortune, is yet as proud as he was in the days of his highest prosperity—too proud to solicit a favour from any one, lest he should be suspected of an interested motive. Besides, recent events must very much have lessened the influence which he once possessed ; and he is far too shrewd, and, I may add, too sensitive, to provoke an insolent reflection."

"I see all that," replied Lord Windermere ; "but we really cannot allow this seat to be lost without an effort. I speak as a party man. Ashford is determined to make a fight for it, and it is not for me to discourage him. I would to heaven Mr Beaton was differently situated ; still, while these malicious stories continue to be circulated, I agree with you that he cannot be expected to appear. By the way, I understand that you have made some important discoveries."

"I was fortunate enough, through accident, to trace the conspiracy that had such an injurious effect upon Mr Beaton's character ; and when the disclosure is made public, he will stand acquitted of all but rashness and imprudence in the eyes of honourable men. But, my Lord, I entreat you to think no more of urging him to take part in any political arrangements. Believe me, the attempt would be in vain ; and it

would only irritate a mind already lacerated, not so much by failure, as by unworthy and unmerited suspicion."

"You speak sensibly, Mr Sinclair, as well as feelingly," said Lord Windermere; "and I respect and appreciate your motives. But there can be no harm in my having an interview with Mr Poins, who, being a solicitor, may not object to be consulted on a subject which is so far professional that it may give him some occupation, if an election petition should be preferred; and I shall esteem it as a great favour if you will at once ask him to come here—that is, if you find him well disposed to the adventure. This is a strange way of paying debts," continued the Earl, with a smile; "but you make a bankrupt of me against my own inclination. Yet stay—my head has been so occupied with this freak of Ashford's that I can think of nothing else. You are now, I understand, independent in your means—your talents are indisputable—your political profession the same as ours. Why not enter Parliament, where you may look forward to a proud career? Say the word, and I pledge you my honour that you shall have a seat; or at all events, whether returned or not, that the election shall cost you nothing."

"I am deeply sensible of your Lordship's kindness," I replied, "and sincerely grateful for this high proof of your esteem and confidence; but I have contemplated parliamentary life from the humble yet elevated situation of the reporters' gallery; and I cannot aver with truth that for me it has any fascination."

I then went to sound old Poins, but I presently perceived that there was no occasion for beating about the bush. He was a fierce politician of the highest caste of Conservatism, and keen as a ferret for the fray. He chuckled and rubbed his hands when he heard of Lord Ashford's intentions, and vowed that he would leave no stone unturned to insure his success.

"You were quite right, though," he said, "in discouraging the idea of making a direct application to Beaton. Nothing on earth, I am convinced, would induce him to meddle with the business, for he considers himself politically dead. Indeed he would have resigned his seat ere now, had I not persuaded him to delay taking that step, as it might have tended to aggravate the current rumours. It is fortunate that I did so, for Lord Ashford will have a better chance than any other candidate. So I shall instantly wait upon the Earl."

"You will, however, I presume, consider it due to Mr Beaton to give him notice of what is going on, if Lord Ashford should resolve to stand?"

"Certainly—certainly! Leave that to me. I shall manage so as not to give him the slightest cause for umbrage. And that reminds me to tell you—what I ought to have done before, but politics, when they once take hold of the mind, make us forget everything else—that Beaton is now ready to receive you. He did not say so expressly, but I could see from his manner that such was his wish. Therefore, go to him presently; and harkye—as he is not a person with

whom you are ever likely to become intimate, I advise you, if you have anything *particular* to say to him, not to lose this opportunity. I think he has a kind of impression that you are not quite so disinterested a person as you would have us believe. You comprehend me?"

"Pray, Mr Poins, are you a wizard as well as a lawyer?"

"A little of both, perhaps. But, my good boy, it requires neither spell nor incantation to discover your thoughts. Go, therefore; but remember you have to deal with a man who makes no allowance for sentiment, and is not to be won by fine speeches—so shape your course accordingly."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PROPOSAL.

THERE are certain visits which it is little short of torture to make. No one steps cheerfully into a dentist's parlour, or into the office of a money-lender if his business is to negotiate the renewal of a bill. An irritable old uncle who knows that he can pester and bully you with impunity, because you are in some measure dependent on his will, or a cankered aunt, who thinks that for the expectancy of her hoarded sixpences you are bound to do her bidding with the meek submission of a slave, are not persons into whose presence you pass with feelings of unmingled joy. But of all visits, the most uncomfortable is that which you are compelled to pay to *paterfamilias*, when you have fairly made up your mind to propose.

I am given to understand, and consider it quite natural to the situation, that young gentlemen so circumstanced should prepare beforehand a neat little address, to be delivered with becoming modesty and seeming hesitation. It must not be too flowery, for

parental instinct speedily reverts to the grand point of settlements ; yet it must not be assimilated to the language which is used in cases of sale and barter, or other kinds of mundane trafficking. It is indeed a difficult style of speech to arrange ; but fortunately the majority of mankind are not called upon frequently to practise that sort of composition.

How was I to open the subject to Mr Beaton ? That of course, was my engrossing thought as I walked towards his house ; and the more I pondered, the more confused did my ideas become. Nor do I wonder at this, even now, when I look back through the vista of years to past events with that calmness which time engenders ; for I stood in a somewhat strange and peculiar relation to the man. I knew that he did not like me personally, for I had once grievously offended him, and he was not of a forgiving nature. I had reason, however, to think that my recent services had, to some extent, softened his prejudices, and removed false impressions ; still, I was sure that he could not like me, and, to confess the truth, I did not entertain for him sentiments of cordial affection. Our instinct is often stronger than our reason. There are men whom we may admire and respect, but whom we never can love ; and, on the contrary, we sometimes feel ourselves irresistibly attracted towards people whose reputation does not stand high in the general estimation of their fellows. Let who will try to explain this phenomenon through the science—if it be one—of metaphysics. For my own part, I accept unhesitatingly

the solution of Sir Kenelm Digby, and take refuge in the doctrine of innate sympathy and antipathy.

The result of my cogitations was absolutely *nil*—in fact, I might as well have been thinking about the last opera, or any other popular topic of the day ; for when I reached Mr Beaton's door, I had no more idea of what I ought to say, than if I had been called upon suddenly to preach a sermon in Ashantee. "Never mind !" thought I, "I shall get through it somehow or other—but, upon my soul, I believe I could walk with more equanimity into the lion's cage in a menagerie !"

My lion, however, was wonderfully calm and placable. He received me graciously, asked many questions as to the details of the affair at Torcaster, but was parsimonious in his acknowledgments. Evidently he was gratified with the results, but he spoke of what I had done as if it had been the simple fulfilment of a duty. I could not help recalling his words—"look not for gratitude from me !"

So long as he was disposed to lead the conversation, I allowed him to do so ; but presently, without appearing to be the least fatigued, he ceased to speak, and regarded me steadfastly, as if he expected I should explain my motive for paying him a visit. I took the hint, which, indeed, I could not evade, and began.

"Mr Beaton, you once asked me why I felt an interest in your fortunes,—may I make an explanation now ?"

"If you please. But allow me to correct you. Your interest was in my *misfortunes*."

“True, sir. But under other circumstances you would hardly have admitted that claim.”

“On the contrary, Mr Sinclair, I did ask from you, upon one occasion when I really thought I had a right to do so, a favour which you peremptorily declined.”

“Do you still blame me for that refusal, Mr Beaton?”

I had lodged a home-thrust. His eye became unsettled, and he moved uneasily in his chair.

“No!” said he, with a sort of effort. “No—I cannot blame you for it! It irritated me at the time—for, to be plain with you, I thought you were an arrogant upstart, and I had firm belief then in the immensity of my own resources. I have that belief still, and I would have prospered had not villany pulled me down, and if the idiotic mass, whom we call the public, had been sane enough to resist a panic. But, for your own interest, you acted right—perfectly right; and I rejoice that you took that course.”

“Then, Mr Beaton, I stand acquitted from the charge of misconduct?”

“Certainly; and it is my wish that our past differences should be forgotten.”

“And so is it mine,” I continued. “Mr Beaton, my explanation may be comprised in a very few words. I am a suitor for the hand of your daughter.”

“I respect your plainness, sir,” replied Beaton. “You come to the point at once, and like a man. Mary, I presume, knows of this?”

“I have at least reason to hope that my attentions are not disagreeable to Miss Beaton.”

“Hum !—a delicate way, I suppose, of intimating that you have her full consent ! And pray, sir—if you admit my right to pry into these matters—how did your acquaintance originate ?”

“We met at Wilbury Hall, sir—at Colonel Stanhope’s.”

“Ay—the Stanhopes—Mary was much with them. Well, no great harm in that—and since in London, I suppose ? Pray, were you acquainted with my very polite and elegant sister, Mrs Walton ?”

“No, sir ; I have not that honour.”

“So much the better. It would be difficult to make me approve of anything which that woman had sanctioned. Are you aware that Mary has no fortune of her own—no expectations ? What was mine, is scattered to the four winds of heaven.”

“It is the knowledge of that which emboldens me to make this declaration.”

“What ! You would not have had courage enough to aspire to the hand of the heiress ? Well, you show some courage, or at least candour, in admitting so much ; and I may as well say frankly that you should not have had my consent. Could you have expected it ? Why, sir, in that case I must have set you down as a needy fortune-hunter, far less entitled to consideration than some, even of the same class, who were then hovering round my daughter.”

“Then, Mr Beaton, you would have greatly wronged me.”

“So I believe, else I would not be conversing with

you so calmly at the present hour. But I have not the faculty of looking into men's hearts, and such is the conclusion at which, most assuredly, I would have arrived."

"You would have considered me unworthy of her?"

"Yes—I should have done so then, but matters are quite otherwise now. You have shown yourself to be a man of sense and spirit. You came forward to help me at a time when I could make no exertion; and you brought the business you took in hand to a successful conclusion. These are not things to be overlooked or forgotten; and as fortune is on your side rather than hers—why, if Mary consents to marry you, I shall place no obstacle in the way."

"A thousand thanks, Mr Beaton! Rely upon it, the study of my life shall be to make your daughter happy."

"Sir, I do you the justice to believe that you speak quite sincerely. You are, so far as I have observed, not over-ambitious, therefore you are the more likely to cultivate the domestic qualities. You have shrewdness enough to keep your fortune, such as it is, without squandering it; and Poins speaks highly of your character. Take her therefore; for, in truth, I have no right to forbid the banns. Take her, and God be with you both!"

So saying, he extended to me his hand—coldly, indeed, but not unkindly—and such was the result of my wooing.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEW CANDIDATES IN THE FIELD.

THE reader will suppose that I lost no time in hurrying to the Stanhopes to convey to Mary the intelligence that her father had given his consent. Let him also imagine the interview that ensued ; for I swear by all that lovers hold most dear, nothing shall tempt me to deviate from my purpose of maintaining a rigid silence as regards such tender passages. Indeed, I have excellent reasons for doing so ; for, though Mary is the best-tempered woman in the world, still—but I had better proceed.

I had thought that Colonel Stanhope's house might offer a safe refuge to a man who desired to get out of the vortex of political excitement ; but in this I was grossly mistaken. Mary warned me that I must prepare myself for a surprise ; and on re-entering the drawing-room, I found Amy making up rosettes of ribbon as busily as any milliner's girl who has to work for her daily bread. Carlton, too, was pacing the room in a way which, with the example of Mrs Mala-

prop before my eyes, I can only describe as incoherent.

“Pray, Miss Stanhope,” said I, “for what purpose are you constructing those elegant little badges? I observe they are not white, else I might have formed some conjecture as to their use.”

“Pshaw—as if old engaged people such as George and I thought about such trifles! You, however, may be permitted, for a few days at least, to dream dreams, and to see visions. Yet I am not sure that we can allow you even so much time, for great things are in preparation. Know, Mr Sinclair, that, like Flora MacIvor, I am making up favours for a grand public ceremony, in which George is to take a part.”

“Out, equivocating girl!” cried Carlton. “Why perplexest thou the man? Have you lost the use of your eyes, Sinclair, that you do not recognise these for election cockades? Ay, and we shall wear them bravely even on the front of the hustings!”

“And for whom are they to be worn?”

“Why, for me, to be sure! I have made up my mind to come forward and contest our division of the county.”

“What! In room of Lord Ashford?”

“No. It is true that Ashford, who is a fine indomitable fellow, will not come forward again. If he did, he would walk over the course to a certainty; but he has set his heart on wrenching a borough from the grasp of a gigantic cotton-spinner. You know that, by tacit compact, we have hitherto shared the repre-

sentation of our division of the county with the Whigs. That is now at an end; and I go forward expressly to oppose Sir Godfrey Norton, who is presently Ashford's colleague."

"Will the other party put forward a second man?"

"Yes. They intend to start a pseudo-Conservative; but him we are determined to smite, and a first-rate man is ready to offer him battle."

"Indeed! Things are more advanced here than I could have believed; but I am delighted to find you animated by such a spirit. And who may be your fellow-champion?"

"A very good friend of yours, Sinclair; but I do not think you would ever light on his name, if I were to put you to the trouble of guessing. Lumley is the man!"

"Lumley! You do indeed amaze me! Why, it was part of his philosophy never to meddle with elections; and I have heard him maintain an argument that Pythagoras meant to inculcate that doctrine when he warned his disciples against beans."

"You must have interpreted his words too strictly, Sinclair. Pythagoras merely objected to vote by ballot, and Lumley is in that respect Pythagorean. But I wonder not that you are surprised. I declare I was almost thunderstruck when Lumley announced to me his intention."

"Do you mean to say that he comes forward of his own accord, and without urging?"

"Even so. The way of it was this: Ashford made

up his mind two days ago to stand for the borough, and came here to notify that to Colonel Stanhope, in order that no time might be lost in providing a substitute. The scheme appeared to the colonel and also to me rather a wild one ; but Ashford was bent upon it, so we had to determine at once what was to be done. You have often heard me, Sinclair, bemoaning my idleness ; and now it flashed across me that here was an opportunity, such as might never again occur, of making myself practically useful. Moreover, I could not reconcile myself to the thought of remaining inactive in a crisis like this, when all our young men were up in arms ; and I suppose that something in my manner struck Ashford, for, after conversing for a minute about a candidate, he laid his hand upon my shoulder and said, ‘ Why look beyond this very room ? Here stands the man we want.’ The colonel was of course overjoyed ; and I—put no objections in the way.”

“ Nothing,” said I, “ could have happened more opportunely. You are but fulfilling your destiny, and I am glad to see that Miss Stanhope does not quarrel with your choice.”

“ On the contrary,” said Amy, “ Miss Stanhope is but too well pleased to see her George take his proper place in the ranks of those gallant men who are resolute to preserve the constitution.”

“ Bravo !” cried I, “ spoke like another Boadicea ! You are dangerous company, ladies ! If this goes on, I shall be esteemed a *faineant* if I too do not take part in the contest.”

“Don’t you think,” said Mary, “that you might go down to Scotland, and——?”

“O, for heaven’s sake, spare me a while! I am devoted to Scotland as my mother country; but just at this moment she is in one of her sullen hypochondriacal fits, and will not listen to reason. Bless her, she is always in extremes! One while she is frantically loyal—another while she is savagely democratic. Frightful intemperance characterises one generation—total abstinence is insisted on by the next. The trained bands of Edinburgh that attended at the execution of Montrose, led Argyle to the scaffold. The grandsons of the men who died around their king at Flodden were foremost in their persecution of Queen Mary. Nevertheless, I would die sooner than see her wronged; but she is now labouring under the delusion that she is Jenny Geddes, and I do not relish the notion of having my skull fractured by what my friend Davie Osett would denominate a creepie!”

“Well,” said Carlton, laughing, “I think, under the circumstances, we must let you off this time; but remember that such an excuse for evading duty will not always pass muster. And it gladdens me to observe that you are likely to have an active monitor. Nay, Mary—do not blush! Never had we more joyful tidings than what Norman has brought us to-day. But in these discussions we are losing sight of Lumley.”

“True, O M.P. that is to be! Let us hark back to our friend.”

“Ashford,” continued Carlton, “was very strongly

of opinion that we should start two men, averring from his knowledge of the county, that it was quite on the cards that both of them might come in ; and you will readily imagine that, having engaged myself to this enterprise, I was anxious to have the best possible man I could procure as my confederate. Not having an extensive acquaintance at the clubs, it occurred to me that Lumley was an excellent person to consult with. His landed estate is in our county, and though he is not resident—because, being a bachelor, he does not deem it necessary to keep up a country establishment—he is, nevertheless, vastly popular. My only fear was that he might prove to be somewhat indifferent.

“ I dashed at once into the history of the affair, and Lumley heard me out with the gravity of an Indian sachem. When I had finished, he said coolly—

“ ‘ Then, Carlton, I understand that you come forward to oppose Sir Godfrey Norton—a case of Dares against Entellus, though probably with a different result ? ’

“ ‘ Yes,’ I replied; ‘ the Whig is my direct antagonist.’

“ ‘ And you want to find some one to oppose the political hermaphrodite ? ’

“ ‘ Precisely so.’

“ ‘ Then, if you cannot discover a worthier candidate, why, I don’t care if I venture into the field ! ’

“ ‘ What—you, Lumley ? How delighted our friends will be ! This is indeed an unexpected accession of strength.’

“ ‘That may or may not be, but at all events we shall make the trial. You see, Carlton, I want excitement. My old feelings were in favour of absolute repose, but I am now satisfied that I was in error. I require some stimulus to keep my blood in circulation ; and as I have a decided objection to distilled waters, it occurs to me that politics will have the desired effect. But confound this odious trick of talking loosely ! No, Carlton—I have higher motives ! I feel, as you do, that it is the duty of an English gentleman to shrink from no sacrifice in support of the principles which he professes. It was grand devotion to their cause, alike by Royalist and Parliamentarian, that makes us regard our old civil war, even now, with sentiments akin to admiration. It was a noble and elevating strife ; for men fought on either side, not for plunder or revenge, but from a supreme conviction that they were called on to do battle for the truth. Such days as those let us pray that England may never see again ; but Heaven forbid that our sloth and indolence should render us unworthy of our ancestry ! ’

“ I wish,” continued Carlton, “ that you could have heard Lumley so deliver himself. He seemed absolutely to dilate as he spoke ; and there was an energy in his tone, and a fire in his eye, that I never witnessed before. Rely upon it, he will one day make a sensation in Parliament. Now, don’t I deserve credit for having plucked this Theseus from his seat ? ”

“ What ! ” said I, “ soars your presumption so high

already, that you dare to liken yourself to Hercules ? What if I were to say, Beware of Dejanira ? ”

“ Nay,” said Carlton, “ I’ll warrant that there is no poison in these honest cockades. But let us apply ourselves to business, for I already feel as if I were a member of half-a-dozen committees. To-morrow sees us all *en route* for Wilbury. When I say all, I include Mary ; because Amy here, though very valorous in London, has notions about brickbats, eggs, and sundry kinds of garbage, which, she thinks, are the invariable concomitants of elections, and she would be miserable if left alone while I am prosecuting my canvass. Now I am commissioned by Colonel Stanhope to say that, if Mr Norman Sinclair chooses to accompany us, our party will be much exhilarated thereby. Nevertheless, if he prefers remaining in London——”

“ Hush, George ! When do you start ? ”

“ At twelve precisely. But observe, my good fellow—though the Colonel imposes no conditions, I do, and shall insist peremptorily on their fulfilment. You shall be allowed, as reason is, two or three hours each day to make private speeches, with which I have nothing to do ; but the remainder of your time—of course excluding reasonable intervals for sleep—is to be at my disposal ; and whenever it is deemed necessary, either on my behalf or on that of Lumley, that a speech upon the general question should be delivered, we expect you to try your eloquence. On my honour

I am serious. Were it only with a view to the future, you must be put into training."

"The conditions are rather hard, but I shall agree to them ; being thoroughly assured that my first effort at stump oratory will procure me dispensation for the remainder of the period."

CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER VISIT TO WILBURY.

IT was, I confess, rather an annoyance to me to find Wilbury Hall, which I had hitherto known as the sanctuary of elegance and domestic quiet, transformed into the headquarters of a grand electioneering movement. Colonel Stanhope, though much esteemed by his neighbours and greatly beloved by his tenantry, was, I believe, regarded as a somewhat fastidious man, methodical in his arrangements, orderly in his mode of living, and with just so much of the martinet about him as kept people from presuming in the slightest degree to trespass upon his affability and good-nature. No one, therefore, expected that his mansion would be made an open house to all comers, even although his future son-in-law had taken so prominent a part in the contest ; but the Colonel emphatically declared that, if he could not otherwise assist in the furtherance of the good cause, Wilbury Hall must be recognised as the centre for political communication, and that the credit of the house for old English hospitality

should be most amply maintained. As a natural consequence, every person who had election business to transact, or who could frame a plausible pretext for presenting himself in the character of a well-wisher or a partisan, came thither ; and if popular devotion could be estimated in a ratio corresponding to the consumption of beef and beer, there was no ground whatever for attributing lukewarmness or indifference to our supporters. I suspect that the estimable old butler, though frantically zealous for the success of Master George, whom he said he could remember before he was breeched, was inwardly sore aggrieved by the wassail and profusion which made the usually well-ordered servants'-hall resemble the taproom of a tavern. As for the agents and men of respectable status, who would have been affronted if on such an occasion they had been treated otherwise than as parlour guests, it was the Colonel's express desire that the choicest wines which his cellar contained should be set before them—a mandate which the old man durst not disobey, though it went to his heart to give out rich Burgundy and first-growth claret for the refectation of some score of individuals who would have gulped down with equal zest the fieriest port and sherry that ever came direct from the vaults of a wholesale and unscrupulous adulterator.

Such a scene might not have been altogether unamusing at another time ; but, situated as I was, the ceaseless bustle and turmoil somewhat jarred on my nerves. I could not bring myself to listen with anything like

interest to the numerous bulletins that reached us about declared auxiliaries, hesitating compromisers, and voters who were impressed with the notion that their suffrages were as marketable as green-pease. In short, I wanted quiet ; but that inestimable boon was denied me. I was dragged into the vortex, *nolens volens*, as the fisher's boat is caught by the swirl of the absorbing maelstrom. Politics, like champagne, had got into the heads of every one, and had slightly affected their reason. Carlton was hardly recognisable. He had been taken possession of by the whole seven demons of oratory, and expended more breath in one day than might have maintained the lungs of an apostle of Wesley for a week. Frank Stanhope, who had come express from Oxford for the election, and who acted as George's adjutant, was thoroughly in his element, galloping through the country from morning to night under the vain delusion that he was canvassing, a function which he thought was best performed by kissing the prettiest girls he encountered. Little Dr Wayles was so ardent in the cause, that he would with the most hearty goodwill have excommunicated any recusant parishioner who demurred to being pastorally driven ; and nothing but a solemn sense of duty restrained him from enlivening his pulpit discourses with pungent political allusions. Of Lumley we saw little : he was fighting his own battle elsewhere, as we were assured, most vigorously, and with every prospect of success.

That was no lover's Elysium, such as I had hoped to find ; for now that every obstacle was removed, and

disheartening doubts no longer clouded the horizon, I yearned to indulge in that sweet sympathetic intercourse, the rapture of which is beyond the power of poetry to express—in those visions of the future, so brightly tinted and so fair that they far surpass in vividness and delight our dreams of the early Eden. Already we had spoken of the past—of our fears and trials—of our secret thoughts and half-unconscious aspirations—as those who have voyaged together discourse, when safely arrived in haven, of the perils and dangers of the deep. These, however, were but remembrances, surely never to be forgotten, yet not altogether free from that sombre tinge which is the invariable attribute of the past. For amidst the triumph which we cannot but feel at the retrospection of difficulties overcome, of doubts resolved, and of enmities met and vanquished, there still lingers a sense of the sharp pain we have endured, and the sorrow that preyed on our souls ; for where woe has been, there will its traces remain, as no subsequent growth of verdure can efface the track of the winter torrent. But it is our noble privilege and sublime inheritance that we may regard the future as our own ; not alloying it by any base element of dread, or marring its fair expectation by evoking phantoms of dismay. Bright and clear before us lies the sunny landscape—over earth and sea broods a holy calm, and no speck is in the limitless ether ; wherefore, then, disturb the enjoyment of the hour by anticipations of storm and tempest ?

I too had been a day-dreamer, and had limned a

picture which, I fondly hoped, Mary would contemplate with an enthusiasm similar to my own. It was, to be sure, only extant as yet in my own imagination, and perhaps the details were not very carefully finished ; but I had a vision of a Highland home embosomed in woods, musical with the warbling of the thrush and the plaintive call of the cushat—of a waterfall hard by, half-hidden by the boughs of the graceful birch—of a broad blue lake, starred by an islet, wherein, surrounded by a group of venerable firs, stand the ruins of an ancient monastery, its buttresses entwined by ivy—of a range of purple hills beyond, over-topped by the storm-beaten crest of a giant mountain, the first of all the alpine brethren to redden in the glories of the dawn. I wanted to describe the scene to Mary as I saw it, or fancied that I saw it, and expatiate upon the delights that awaited us there, far away from the throng of the crowded city, the devouring cares and the paltry ambitions that make men prematurely old, stain their souls with avarice and envy, and blunt the better feelings of their nature. I was not a poet, but I knew that on such a theme I could descant delightedly ; and in itself it seemed so fresh and fair as to demand no embellishment from art. Eloquence could not heighten its charm, nor could language enhance its beauty. Word-painting cannot pretend to do more than shadow forth an imperfect image—enough if it can create a desire to behold and enjoy the original.

But alas for day-dreams when they are opposed to stern realities ! Not more surely does the descent of a

stone shatter the clear mirror of the pool and make havoc of the reflected landscape, than do mundane thoughts disperse the fairy pictures of the imagination. No bower at Wilbury now was sacred to lovers' vows—neither garden nor conservatory afforded an inviolable place of refuge. That wretch, Carlton, under the influence of politics, had become a monster of cruelty; and never was unfortunate Huguenot more hotly persecuted by familiar of the Inquisition, than was I by the remorseless friend in whom I had been weak enough to repose my trust. Often, in the midst of our most delicious communings, did I hear him shout forth my name; and if I responded not directly to the call, the savage appeared in person, and with a chuckle of infernal glee dragged me forth to do his bidding. One while I had to ride out on a canvassing expedition; at another I was desired to make myself useful by concocting or revising an address. In spite of my most earnest remonstrances, I was installed as chairman of the placard committee; the pyrotechnic department also was confided to my charge, in virtue of which appointment I was expected to furnish an unlimited supply of squibs; and lastly, at farmers' dinners, I was compelled to hold forth upon the state of the nation, agricultural depression, the probable effect of foreign importations, and the prices of wheat at Rostock and Riga; all which I did with becoming gravity and unction, and with quite as much practical knowledge of the subjects as was possessed by the most noted economists of the day. Indeed, I was in the fair way

of attaining reputation as a first-rate statistical authority ; and I make no manner of doubt that, if I had chosen to prosecute such studies, or, without encumbering myself at all with study, persevered in strenuous assertion, I should by this time have become famous as the founder of a new school of politico-economical doctrine, have utterly eclipsed the feeble star of Bastiat, and perhaps have been ranked as a luminary alongside of Adam Smith, whose intellectual achievements have shed such a rare lustre on the respectable burgh of Kirkcaldy.

One day, however, I determined to snatch from business, and to consider entirely as my own ; so, resisting the entreaties of Carlton, who wished to despatch me on some profitless errand, I wandered forth with Mary into the chase. It was one of those delightful summer days in which the fair glades of England seem more than usually beautiful ; the air was warm and fragrant, and the hum of insect life was loud in the pleasant umbrage of the lime-trees. Couched amidst the fern lay the dappled deer, and ever and anon the gorgeous pheasant would run across our path, too secure from danger in that protected spot to rise on the wing, and perhaps not unwilling through vanity—a passion which some of the inferior creatures share in common with ourselves—to display the splendour of his plumage. Strolling onwards through a wilderness of Portugal laurels and exotic evergreens, we came to an artificial lake, where the pike were basking and the dragon-flies darting among the reeds ; and there, seated

on the soft elastic moss beneath a venerable oak, which had long ceased to be a sapling when King Charles took shelter among the boughs of one its kindred, we renewed our vows of pure and undying love.

Sacred and blissful moments, when heart speaks to heart without disguise, and no word of hypocrisy impedes the frank utterance of the soul! O ye who, reared under the influence of a false and perverted system, regard love but as a passing weakness, or at best but an episode in existence—ye who think of marriage, not as a union of souls which even death cannot entirely sever, but as a thing of barter and arrangement—know this, that of all estimable blessings you are despising the purest and the best, and that you are blindly forfeiting your chance of regaining all of paradise that yet lingers upon earth, the foretaste of the beatitude of heaven!

Lovers take no count of time; but we could not thus have been long occupied, when a stentorian shout broke upon my ear, and a familiar voice in Doric accents made the woods vocal with the name of Sinclair.

“Hark, Norman!” said Mary, “some one calls you.”

“Yes!” I replied; “and he bawls loud enough to startle Rip van Winkle from his trance. Don’t disturb yourself! It is, if I may trust my ears, no less a person than my foster-brother Davie Osett; though what brings him here at such a time is more than I can possibly conjecture. There again! I must absolutely stop his bellowing, else he will frighten all the deer in the chase. Hallo—Davie! Davie Osett!”

And bursting from the evergreens, appeared the stalwart figure of the surveyor.

"Welcome, dear Davie!" said I, "though, to be sure, you are pretty well acquainted with the woods of Wilbury already. Last time, I remember, you were suspected of being a poacher; pray, in what capacity do you now repeat your visit?"

"Ah, Mr Norman! you might let that flee stick to the wa'. But I owe you an apology for breaking in where I maybe wasna just expected, mair by token that there is a lady in the case." And Davie, with natural courtesy, performed a profound salaam.

"The lady," said Mary, "does not regard Mr Osett as a stranger, though she never has met with him before. Mr Sinclair has told me how much he owes to your courage and fidelity."

"Houts, mem!" quoth Davie, "I'se warrant he's been making a sang about naething ava! But it's just like Mr Norman. You see, simple as I am, he and I are foster-brithers, and that's maist as good as though we counted kith and kin. Might I be sae bauld as to speer if you are not Miss Beaton?"

"Certainly, Mr Osett; that is my name."

"And a bonny ane it is, but no bonnier than her to whom it belongs! You maun excuse my country breeding, Miss, but it does my heart good to see your winsome face, and to think that Mr Norman——"

"Come, come, Davie!" said I, "none of your glamour here! I can assure you, Mary, this foster-brother of mine is a very dangerous fellow. He has somehow

or other got possession of the spells that Johnie Faa and the gypsies used to fascinate the Countess of Cassilis ; and he is by no means particular as to their employment. For instance, I am given to understand that there is a certain Jean Leslie——”

“ Fie for shame, Mr Norman ! Wad ye betray confidences ? Dinna believe him, Miss ; he was aye fond of joking ! ”

“ Not the less on that account,” said I, “ have the Fates decreed that in due course of time Jean Leslie shall become Mrs Osett. What ! did I not hear you singing about her in your sleep ? But, seriously, what brings you here, Davie ? I suspect it must be some important errand.”

“ ’Deed it’s that, Mr Norman. You are wanted in London immediately. It was auld Mr Poins that found me out, and bade me come down and warn you.”

“ O Norman ! ” cried Mary, turning very pale. “ Can it be that some new misfortune has overtaken my father ? If so, never would I forgive myself for being away from him ! ”

“ Be calm, dearest Mary ! My life for it, there is no ground for apprehension, else Osett would not have spoken so lightly. Heard you anything of Mr Beaton, Davie ? ”

“ O, he’s weel enough, I believe,” said the surveyor. “ Nae doubt, sair cast down, puir gentleman ! but ilka ane has his sorrows to thole. Na—there’s naething the matter wi’ him, out Mr Poins wants to see you about that awful blackguard the Jew.”

“Speedwell?” said I. “What of him?”

“I’ll tell you mair about that presently. Meanwhile, I think I’ll just be stepping back to the house, and bide your coming. It’s grand quarters there; for that auld respectable man, the butler, wadna hear of my coming out to seek for you till I had tasted both meat and drink; and, my certie, but the claret’s running there as fast as it used to do langsyne frae the cross fountain at Linlithgow, when Scotland had a king o’ her ain! But dinna be over lang, for Mr Pains will no be easy till he sees you.”

“I dread very much,” said Mary, after Osett had taken his departure, “that he brings some distressing intelligence. God grant it may not be of a kind to add to the afflictions of my dear father! O Norman! is it not selfish in me to feel so happy amidst so much domestic distress?”

“No, Mary,” said I, “for without distress we never should have known happiness. And you need not take alarm at Osett’s affectation of mystery. He is a most excellent fellow, but, in common with my countrymen of the class to which he belongs, he dearly loves a bit of mystery, and will not be coerced into revealing it until it suits his own convenience. Besides, Speedwell has already made an ample confession, which it would be wholly impossible for him to retract.”

“Yet I cannot help trembling, Norman! Why should they have sent for you in such haste? Surely you have done enough to be spared from further trouble in these wretched affairs!”

“ You forget, dearest, that I have now a right to be considered as one of the family. I had no greater boon to ask than that which your father has freely granted ; and by that act he has bound me to him for ever. Do not be afraid. I shall not be long absent ; and were it not that I must forego your dear company for a time, London would be as pleasant as Wilbury, which, in its present condition—I say that with all respect for our kind and hospitable friends—is a sort of political Pandemonium.”

On arriving at the house I had a private interview with Osett.

“ I didna like, Mr Norman,” he said, “ to come out wi’ all I had to say before the young lady, for the news I bring is of a fearsome kind. That wretched creature, Speedwell——”

“ What ! ” cried I. “ Can he have escaped from prison ? ”

“ Na—he’s in prison still ; but it is a prison the door of which will be steekit till the great day of judgment ! Escaped ? That has he, if it be an escape for a reckless sinner to pass from the dowiest dungeon on earth to the place of fire and brimstone ! Speedwell has gone to his account ; and the Lord keep ony Christian man from running up sic an awful reckoning ! ”

“ Dead ! ” I exclaimed.

“ E’en sae ! ” replied Davie. “ The wicked man has been taken in his ain net, and has fallen into the snare that he set for others. Little thought the cruel wretch, yon time down-by at Torcaster, when he was ettling to

take the life o' the puir feckless lad, whose warst crime was keeping company wi' sic a circumceesed apostate, that in less than a month he himsel' wad be girning in the deadthraws, wi' the poison seething in his bowels, and the thick foam glueing up the lips that never had uttered a prayer !”

“Terrible indeed !” said I. “Did he die by his own hand ?”

“That passes my knowledge,” replied Davie. “I ken naething beyond this, that he is dead, and that he died by poison. But auld Mr Poins is in an unco taking about it, and he bade me tell you to come to London without any delay ; for, as he said, this event might prove of serious consequence to Mr Beaton.”

“Nay, then,” said I, “there is no time to be lost. Hold yourself in readiness, Osett, to start in a quarter of an hour.”

“That will I,” quoth Davie, “though to leave a house like this wad be a sair trial for a hungry man. It's clean beyond my notion of the flesh-pots of Egypt. But, O Mr Norman, ye hae the luck on your side ! Never shone the sun on a more buirdly lady—nane of your slim, sma', delicate bits o' things that can stand neither wind nor weet, and are as helpless as young linties in the nest—but a stately queen-like creature, with an e'e as full and bright, and a voice as sweet as that o' the mavis, the bloom o' the damask rose on her cheek, and a smile sae winsome that the dourest man alive wad be fain to do her bidding ! Nae wonder that you were keen for her sake to serve the grim auld Laban of a father !”

CHAPTER XXI.

RETRIBUTION.

I WAS much relieved, on arriving in town, to find that Mr Poins had, in so far as Mr Beaton's interests were concerned, attached more consequence than was due to the sudden death of Speedwell. There was yet, it appeared, sufficient evidence to convict Dobigging of the crime of forgery ; and Speedwell's deposition, which had been taken before a magistrate, was now available at the trial. But the most important and really gratifying circumstance was this, that Dobigging, finding his chances of escape to be desperate, had resolved to make a full confession ; and, sending for Mr Poins, had given him such information as to justify a reasonable hope that much of the lost money might be recovered, and that Mr Beaton might be enabled to pay his creditors in full, though without the prospect of a reversion.

“ If that be so,” said Poins, “ my old friend has got a new lease of life. I know him well. So long as he remained in debt, he would have pined and fretted

himself away ; but once let him be a clear man, and with that boundless ingenuity of his he will commence the structure of another fortune. Perhaps, Mr Sinclair, you may hereafter find the connection you are about to make more advantageous than it now appears."

"I should despise myself, Mr Poins, if any such thought had ever crossed my mind."

"No one can suspect that, Mr Sinclair. The desperate state of Beaton's affairs, at the time when you came forward with your proposal, is sufficiently notorious ; and even now, no merely prudent man would court such an alliance. You have obtained all that you sought for, and no doubt are content ; but you will not quarrel, I am sure, with fortune, should it be her whim to give you more. But this is idle talk. I have brought you here perhaps needlessly ; but my anxiety about these affairs of Beaton must be my excuse."

"Nay, Mr Poins, I thank you for having done so—indeed, the intelligence of Speedwell's death would have brought me to London without any summons. Was it a case of suicide ?"

"So it would appear. He was found in his cell in strong convulsions, past the reach of medical assistance, and there can be no doubt that he died of the effects of poison. His motive for the desperate act is as yet a profound mystery."

It was indeed a mystery, and so it long remained. The investigation, which was immediately instituted,

led to nothing. The officials of the prison could not account for Speedwell's possession of the drug which had terminated his wretched existence, and which proved to have been a most deadly essence, contained in a small phial, which was found broken in his cell. It was so small that it was quite possible it might have escaped notice even on the strictest search ; but it was equally possible, to say the least, that it might have been conveyed to him while in prison ; and one fact, which was clearly ascertained, seemed to favour the later hypothesis. On the forenoon of the day on which Speedwell died, a stranger was admitted to see him, under the usual precautions. He was a tall swarthy man, who described himself as an agent retained to conduct the defence ; but he was known to none of the turnkeys, and the name he gave was apparently an assumed one, for he could not afterwards be traced. He remained some time with Speedwell ; under *surveillance*, it was said, but there was reason to doubt that. The agency of gold is powerful even in prisons ; and it was more than suspected that the warder, whose duty it was to be on the watch, had been bribed by the stranger. The confused manner in which he answered the interrogatories put to him regarding the demeanour of the man during their conversation, gave rise to that suspicion, and his general character for probity was not such that he could appeal to it for exoneration. Still, there was nothing to lead to the conclusion that the poison had been forced upon Speedwell ; and, despite some ugly rumours which were

whispered about, his motive for suicide was unexplained. The verdict of the coroner's inquest, therefore, was *felo de se*; and in a very short time the memory of Speedwell, and of his attempted villanies, faded from the public mind.

But it did not fade from mine. Recalling all I knew or had heard of the savage nature of the man, I could not bring myself to believe that he was accessible to feelings of remorse. Men there are who, though they do not shrink from the commission of crime, which with them has become habitual, are yet morbidly sensitive to the shame of detection, and actually experience as much agony from exposure as an innocent person might feel if made the subject of a false accusation. The penitence of criminals is not always feigned. Though it may not be of such a kind as to give reasonable assurance of reform—for it is rarely based on anything that can be called a religious feeling—it is nevertheless something more than hypocrisy. Virtue may be dead, but shame survives. Careless of offending their Maker, they cannot abide the loathing and contempt of their fellow-mortals. Alas! true it is that many who are no criminals in the eyes of the world, habitually shape their conduct upon no higher or holier principle.

But Speedwell was one of those hardened wretches to whom the opinion of mankind was matter of absolute indifference. Not only were right and wrong terms which for him had no significance, but he was utterly impermeable to shame, and steeled against

exposure—a most hardened and brutal villain! How then account for his suicide? I could discover no rational or satisfactory explanation; and no wonder, for a long time elapsed before I became cognisant of the hideous discoveries which immediately preceded the catastrophe. Will the reader bear with me if I relate these somewhat in detail? .

About two years after the period which I purpose to make the limit for my personal story, accident threw me in the way of a gentleman, Mr Hartley, who held the official situation of manager of one of the largest of the English life-assurance companies. Some casual allusion which I made with regard to that quaint pattern of detectives, Mr Pocock, of whose services the gentleman had frequently availed himself, led to a conversation about the frauds which were sometimes committed; and on my instancing the case of Littlewoo, I found, to my surprise, that he was quite aware of all that had taken place, even down to the minutest particular. When I informed him that I was the person who had planned Speedwell's apprehension, Mr Hartley became very communicative; and his narrative, of which I took a jotting at the time, was nearly in the following terms:—

“Although the charge upon which Speedwell was apprehended did not concern the office for which I have the honour to act, nor the other assurance companies, all of which have in some respects a community of interest, yet the fact that he had been arrested on the ground of fraud would of itself have caused us to

institute a close inquiry into certain transactions to which he had previously been a party. It might be supposed that our regulations, carefully devised and fenced by every possible precaution, would be a sufficient safeguard against imposture ; but our experience in such matters leads us to a very different conclusion. Bad lives are continually proffered to us for assurance as good ones—internal maladies, of the most serious kind and of long standing, are often concealed from and escape medical observation—and facts which, if known to the office, would have necessitated the decline of the proposal, are in numerous instances studiously suppressed. These are minor frauds, with which every office must lay its account ; and sometimes, either from motives of policy or for lack of sufficient evidence, they are allowed to pass unchallenged. But the facilities for life assurance, arising from the great competition that exists, have, I grieve to say, led to the commission of far more serious crimes. Not only have dying men been insured, but persons in the prime of life, and in the enjoyment of the soundest health, have been placed on our books through the agency of villains who intended to become their murderers.

“That statement, I am well aware, would be received by many with incredulity, but it will not startle you, who are already cognisant of the attempt made by Speedwell upon the life of that Scotch lad—an attempt which you successfully defeated. Now it so happened that certain circumstances which had transpired, led us to entertain a strong suspicion that one

person at least, if not more, whose policy had been transferred to Speedwell, had met with foul play ; and it was our evident duty, as well as our interest, to employ every means in our power to insure his detection. When, therefore, we were informed by Pocock that the Jew had been arrested at Torcaster in the very act of attempting to administer poison, we set our agents vigorously to work ; and having procured a Secretary of State's warrant, we succeeded in discovering this much, that two men, in consequence of whose death considerable sums of money had been paid to Speedwell, had died of the effects of poison ; or, to speak more correctly, that poison had been administered to or swallowed by them immediately before their decease. That was the clear and uncontrovertible result of an examination conducted by the most expert chemists of the day.

“Prosecuting the investigation further, we ascertained that on one of these men Speedwell had been in close attendance during his last illness—that he had access to his bed-chamber—and that he had given him mixtures with his own hand, after taking which the patient had complained of symptoms precisely similar to those which would have been produced by poison. Finally, by an unexpected chance, we made the discovery, that on the day immediately preceding the illness, a man, answering in all respects to the description of Speedwell, had, by means of a forged order, procured a considerable quantity of that kind of poison which the chemists had detected in the dead

body, from the shop of a neighbouring apothecary. In short, the evidence against him seemed complete in every part, and it was determined that he should be brought to trial on a charge of murder.

“ Our investigations, though made with the utmost possible secrecy, did not escape notice ; and we afterwards found out that they had been watched with extreme solicitude by certain Jews who were of Speedwell’s kindred. I should tell you that the man was both respectably and influentially connected, and might have filled a creditable place in society, had he not early manifested a dissolute, stubborn, and irreclaimable spirit. Jews have, or are said to have, many characteristic faults, but they have also some virtues by which they are peculiarly distinguished, and the most notable of these is their strong family affection. This feeling, which is almost part of their religion, was utterly despised by Speedwell, who, from his boyhood, consorted only with the worst and most abandoned characters, and was consequently regarded by his own relatives as an almost hopeless outcast. Still, he was of their blood, and whatever disgrace his misdeeds might bring upon him must extend also to them, and seriously taint their reputation. We Christians are not strangers to this feeling, though it does not operate upon us with the same intensity as on the Jews.

“ You are doubtless aware that Speedwell had been committed to prison on the charge of being concerned in an extensive forgery of railway scrip. In order to

save himself, he offered to become Queen's evidence against the principal delinquent, who had been the secretary of the company; but there were also two subordinate sharers in the crime, whom his confession gravely compromised—in fact, made them liable to the penalties of transportation. Both of them were Jews, and both were of his own kindred.

“ These young men, who, I verily believe, had been instigated to the commission of the crime by Speedwell, were of course in a state of the utmost consternation and terror; and not being able to devise any scheme for securing their own safety, they determined to lay their case before a member of the family, a man well up in years, respected for his learning and wisdom, and who, moreover, exercised over the rest an almost patriarchal control. In their own homes, the habits of the British Jews do not materially differ from those of their brethren in Palestine. Although the Oriental style of expression is now generally disused, some of the older members of the persuasion still adhere to the peculiar phraseology of their forefathers; regarding it, I doubt not, as a valuable sign and symbol of the most ancient nationality of the world.

“ Doubtless you will wonder how I chanced to become acquainted with particulars which could only be known to a few, and which were of such a nature as to render it exceedingly improbable that they would ever be divulged. The fact is, I purchased these secrets; and that at a price which, though heavy, was

not grudged by the Company. We were determined to unravel the mystery that hung over Speedwell's fate ; and at length, after a most interesting and exhaustive search, we found on the Continent the man who could give us the information. Sure am I that rack and pincers would never have extorted from him the secret, which he yielded at last at the gentler instigation of our gold.

“ The purport of his story was this. No sooner had the young men disclosed the perilous situation in which they were placed, than a family council was summoned ; and the elder, to whom I have already referred, stated with minute precision the various charges against Speedwell, the crimes which he had committed or of which he was accused, and the consequences that must follow his judicial confession.

“ ‘ Friends and brethren,’ said the old man, ‘ I have not called you together for the sake of him whose name henceforth must be as bitter ashes in our mouths, and a reproach to us in the sight of the Gentiles. Were he mine own son, flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone—yea, had I even loved him as Jacob loved Benjamin—I would not stretch forth one finger to save him from the doom he has deserved. Let him die, therefore ; and thou, Miriam my sister, mourn not for him, for it is better that one guilty man should perish than that infamy should light upon our race ! ’

“ The person he accosted was the mother of Speedwell ; a remarkable woman, who claimed and received from those of her persuasion an amount of deference

which the Jews are very chary of according. She was, I believe, the daughter of an old physician of Damascus, reputed to be not only a man of extraordinary learning, but the lineal representative of an ancient family that maintained some show of nobility in the days of the earlier Caliphs. Bred in the East, her thoughts and language were of a kind different from those of the people among whom she had come to dwell ; and it was whispered that her husband, who did not survive the union long, felt somewhat of the apprehension of a man who has undertaken to domesticate a lioness. Such was the woman whom Joshua now addressed. She made no reply beyond an inclination of the head, but another ancient Hebrew took up the word.

“ ‘ Brother Joshua,’ he said, ‘ assuredly thou art the wisest of our people, and thy understanding is as that of the son of Sirach ; yet do I not clearly comprehend thy words. How meanest thou that by his death our race shall escape reproach ? If he dies by the cord, surely then all of us will be put to shame ? ’

“ ‘ True, my brother,’ replied Joshua ; ‘ yet bethink thee how this matter standeth. Seest thou not that the son of perdition will give testimony before a court of justice, whereby it must fall that these youths, who, though they have sinned somewhat, have yet repented, shall be banished forth of the land ? And seest thou not that such witness will avail him nothing, since the avenger of blood is behind him, and he cannot escape from the doom ? ’

“ ‘ All this I see, my brother ; yet either thou speakest darkly, or my wit hath departed from me.’ ”

“ ‘ O dull of thought !’ said Joshua ; ‘ must I speak unto thee as to one of the Gentiles, who are slow to perceive, as the ox is to go forth to its labour ? If it is appointed unto this man to die, surely it were better that he were taken off ere he is brought before the judge ; since, according to the law of the land in which we sojourn, against the dead there is no condemnation ?’ ”

“ A deep silence ensued when the stern old Hebrew had spoken. At length a stout, burly, middle-aged man, who had gained a high reputation as a successful merchant, and whose probity was undoubted, rose up and said—

“ ‘ I am not an elder, and I cannot speak after the fashion of our fathers ; but this I know, that there are two kinds of law, both of which we are all of us bound to obey. The lesser is the law of this realm of England, and by it all men are forbidden to execute judgment at their own hands. The greater is the law of God, written on the tables of stone, and held sacred alike by Jew and Gentile. Hath not He commanded, ‘ Thou shalt do no murder ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Son Levi,’ replied Joshua, ‘ according to thine own lights, and the simplicity and uprightness of thy heart, thou hast spoken well. It is indeed written, ‘ Thou shalt do no murder ;’ and he that slayeth his adversary secretly, for his own gain and profit, or because his heart is hot with hatred within him, the same is a murderer. But our father Moses did no

murder when, to succour one of his brethren, he smote the Egyptian, and hid his body in the sand. Nor was Phineas a murderer when, in his zeal to take away the reproach from his people, he thrust his sword into the side of a Prince of the Congregation. Beware, my son, how thou takest upon thee to interpret the things of the law ; for that pertaineth unto the elders, to whom God hath given light which is wisdom, in the room of strength which is foolishness !’

“ ‘ Verily,’ said the other old Hebrew, ‘ thou hast spoken truth in this, brother Joshua ; else why did our fathers appoint cities of refuge, unto which they who had shed blood unwittingly might flee, and be safe from the avenger ?’

“ ‘ I cannot argue with you on such points,’ replied Levi, sturdily ; ‘ but I know what is the law of this country, and I advise you not to incur its penalties.’

“ ‘ And is it thus that a child of Israel should speak ?’ replied Joshua. ‘ Woe is me for the degeneracy of our people, for the faintness of heart that weighs them down, as a millstone around the neck sinks the swimmer to the bottom of the sea ! What wonder that we should be a broken remnant, scattered among the heathen and persecuted, when we walk not according to the light of God’s law, but by that of the statutes of the Gentiles ? Hath the power of judgment departed from the house of David ? Is there no longer a judge, or a prophet, or a priest among us, that we cannot take counsel together in a matter that toucheth our own reputation—yea, and deal with an

offending brother according as it shall seem good in our sight? Hast thou forgotten, son Levi, how that holy Daniel preferred to be cast into the den of lions rather than submit to the commandment of the Persian king? And is it not written that the priesthood shall be perpetual, and that the sceptre never shall depart out of the house of Judah? Wherefore, then, talkest thou of the laws and the usages of the Gentiles?’

“ ‘I talk of them,’ replied Levi, ‘because I live under them and enjoy their protection; and because, if I break them, I must lay my account with suffering for it in person or in goods. I have no mind, I tell you frankly, to place my neck in jeopardy; nor will I do so for the bidding of all the rabbis that ever sat in the synagogue.’

“ Two or three of the younger Hebrews—though none were present but men of middle age—deriving courage from the undaunted example of Levi, signified their concurrence in his views; and one of them suggested that, so far as the safety of the two young men who might be implicated by Speedwell’s confession was concerned, that might be secured by shipping them off without delay to the Continent, or to some Eastern country, where pursuit and arrest were impossible. If there was a lack of funds, that could readily be supplied—for the Jews, though proverbially hard in their dealings with Christians, are most liberal in ministering to the necessities of their own people. As for the charge of murder, it was their decided

opinion that Speedwell should be left to the operation of the law.

“ Thus there were two parties in the little Jewish senate—the ecclesiastical and the secular—the former being, as is invariably the case, the fiercer and more uncompromising of the two. At length old Joshua, though visibly galled by an opposition that threatened to destroy his supremacy, made a last appeal.

“ ‘Hear me,’ he said, ‘yet a moment! Ye are like children fighting with shadows, for ye know not yet what it is that I propose. What have I said more than this—that if Speedwell hath done that for which the law will condemn him to die, better it were that he should be cut off before his infamy is bruited abroad, and the burden of the reproach cast, as it will be, upon our unhappy people? Ye talk of English justice—what justice has the English people, what justice has any Gentile nation, ever extended to the Jews? Know ye not that, since the days of that King Richard who went to Palestine, and who would have forced his way into the Holy City, but that the Angel of the Lord stood in his path as he stood in that of offending Balaam, no crime, real or fancied, was ever charged against a Jew, that was not cast in the teeth of all the race of Israel? Long ago, in the town of Lincoln, it was said that a Christian child had died by the hand of a Jewess, and straightway there was a general massacre of our people, and their goods were taken for a spoil. Ye will say that these were the deeds of a rude and barbarous age, and that no

such consequences now could follow. Ye say right ; but is open violence all that we have to dread ? If an Englishman should commit a crime, horrid and hideous, such as humanity shudders to think of, do not his countrymen call him a monster, and thank God, in the same breath, that in all England there is but one such villain to be found ? Yet let a Jew commit the same crime, and the cry will be that he comes of a cruel and accursed race, wanton in mischief, pitiless as the hungry lion, and bloodthirsty as the gaunt tiger of the wilderness ! Thousands of the rabble will gather around the scaffold to gloat upon the dying agonies of the Jew ; and not upon his children alone will his sins be visited, but his infamy will light upon the whole of his race and generation. Therefore I say that if Speedwell is condemned by the law to perish for a crime, the bare thought of which is full of horror, you, and I, and all of our blood, must submit to bear a portion of the shame.'

" 'Nay,' said Levi, 'that is true enough ! I remember that, on the morning when Hyams the orange-boy, who had smashed the skull of his fancy-girl, was hanged, the mob broke all my windows ; and but that the bars were of the best, would no doubt have gutted the premises.'

" 'And I,' said another, 'was very nearly taken to the pump only a week ago, merely for having stopped to inquire what the matter was, seeing a crowd hustling a man who, it seems, had been helping himself to a watch. "That's another of them scoundrelly Jews!"

roared a ruffian. "Twig his hooked beak!" And I had enough to do to make my escape with the loss of both my coat-tails and a pocket-book of protested bills !'

" 'Therefore, according to your own testimony,' said Joshua, 'I have uttered no more than the truth. Now, I ask you, and I adjure you to ask yourselves, whether it would not be matter of rejoicing—yea, of thanksgiving—if this Speedwell were to die before the full extent of his infamy is made known, and blazoned throughout the length and breadth of the land? For that which he hath done might make the very stones of the street cry out against him; and shall his iniquity be added to the burden which Jacob has yet to bear?'

" 'So long as you put it in that way,' said Levi, 'I am heartily with you. I would rather hear that Speedwell had been found dead in his cell, than that my heaviest speculation had succeeded. But there is a vast difference between that and conspiring to make away with him !'

" 'Son Levi!' replied Joshua, 'the world reputes thee wise, and such, I doubt not, thou art in thine own matters. Thou canst buy, and sell, and barter, and traffic to advantage; and thou hast heaped up gold in thy secret chamber, as other men heap wheat and grain within their garners. But thou lackest understanding, else assuredly thou wouldest not have imagined so vain a thing. Bethink thee that this Speedwell is in a prison, strong as the tower of

Damascus, fenced with bolts of iron, watched over by men, fierce and vigilant as those savage island dogs that could pull down the mightiest of the bulls of Bashan—how, then, dost thou think it were possible to do a deed of violence? I tell thee, son, that not Solomon in the midst of his guards was more secure from hurt than is this wretched man; nor can any hand cut short his accursed existence *save his own*.’

“ ‘Nay, then,’ said Levi, ‘it is like he will live through his trial; for, if all be true that I have heard regarding him, Speedwell is not the man to harm his own little finger, if by doing that he could save the whole house of Israel from destruction.’

“ ‘Peace!’ said the deep voice of the Jewess Miriam, who now rose among them, casting back her veil, and displaying strong masculine features and grizzled hair, no longer, since this great sorrow had come upon her, arranged with a woman’s neatness—‘Peace! and add not to the affliction of the hour by the idle railing of a Shimei! Peace!—and hear the mother who bore this shame of Israel in her womb, and who suckled him at her breast, pronounce the sentence of his doom! O Joseph—my son, my son! Would to God thou hadst died in thy infancy, so that I could have laid thee to thy rest in the cradle of the earth, and strewn flowers upon thy grave, and mourned for thee with no worse a pang than the sacred sorrow of bereavement! Woe is me that I should have to say the word, and to speak the ban; and yet both must be said and spoken! Thou hast forsworn thy faith as a child of Israel—

thou hast disgraced thy people—thou hast broken into the sanctuary of life, as the thief in the night breaks into the house of the sleeper—thou hast stained thy hands with murder—therefore must thou die the death ! I, thy mother, say it !—I who can condemn, but cannot abjure thee ; for wicked as thou art, it was the will of the Lord that I should bear thee ; and though the earth should open its mouth and swallow thee alive, as it did the company of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, still art thou not less my son !’

“ ‘ Hear her, and be still !’ said the old man Joshua. ‘ The spirit of prophecy is on her, and she speaks with the voice of a Deborah !’

“ ‘ Not so, Joshua—not so, my father !’ replied the agonised woman, her face ghastly with emotion—‘ not like Deborah do I speak, for hers was a song of triumph over Sisera, smitten by the hand of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, and over his discomfited host ! Rather say like Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, who sate watching her dead upon the rock, while the fowls of the air hovered above, and the beasts of the field were prowling round her for their prey. He whom I must call my son hath broken the law both of God and man, and die for it he must ! But not on the scaffold shall he expiate his crime ! Lost as he is, he shall not hang upon the gallows, to be a scoff and execration to the Gentiles. The poison that he gave to others shall he drink himself, and the hand that he stretched forth against their lives shall assuredly cut short his own !’

“ ‘ I will hear no more of this ! ’ cried Levi, starting up. ‘ I have the nerves of a man, not of an executioner ; and it makes my blood run cold to hear a mother planning the destruction of her son, double-dyed villain though he be ! Resolve what ye will, but do it without me. I neither meddle nor mell with such dangerous work as this ! ’

“ ‘ Go then,’ said Joshua, ‘ since thou art so faint-hearted ; but remember to keep silence as to what thou hast heard.’

“ ‘ Trust me for that ! ’ replied Levi. ‘ Not for all the gold of Ophir would I have it known ’ that I had been present at such a council as this. I shall not sleep for a month to come without dreaming of murder and the shambles ! ’

“ ‘ Go thy way ! ’ said Joshua, as Levi, accompanied by one or two of his friends, left the apartment—‘ Go thy way for a weak but well-meaning child of Issachar, apt to carry burdens, but without one spark of the noble spirit that glowed within our fathers of old ! Miriam, my sister, for whom my soul is sad, say—how wilt thou accomplish this ? ’

“ ‘ I will see him once more,’ replied Miriam. ‘ I will speak with him yet again as a mother, and I will strengthen him for what he must and shall do if he would not have my curse upon his head. Wicked as he hath been, and cruel to others, he hath never openly rebelled against me ; nor will he, I think, disobey me now, when he knows that his life is forfeited. Death is very terrible, but more terrible are the judgment,

the shame, and the scaffold; and if he be persuaded that he cannot escape from these, he will die in the darkness of his dungeon. I will see him, and prepare him for what must be.—Alas that such woe should light upon a mother in Israel! Two days shall he have for repentance, if he can yet repent; and on the third my messenger shall go to him, with the last gift of his despairing mother! So shall the reproach of his sin pass over us as the flight of the destroying angel passed over the dwellings of Israel, when they were yet sojourners in the land of Egypt.’

“ ‘O Miriam!’ cried Joshua—‘Woman, who art so sorely tried in the furnace of affliction—worthy art thou to bear the name of the sister of Moses and of Aaron! But this messenger thou hast spoken of—canst thou put thy faith in him?’

“ ‘Judge for thyself,’ said Miriam. ‘Stand forth, Reuben—old servant of my father’s house! Thou hast heard the words that have been spoken—art thou ready to do this thing?’

“ ‘I have heard, and I am ready!’ replied Reuben, a sinister-looking Hebrew, reared in the traditions of the East; who, though not aspiring to more than a menial position, regarded, with thorough contempt, the occupations of many of his brethren in London.

“ ‘And thou wilt not shrink from its accomplishment?’

“ ‘Not I—I swear by the altar and the incense!’

“ ‘Enough!’ said Joshua. ‘Now, brethren, let us to our homes, and pray for the peace of Israel. Miriam

—my sister ! I cannot bid thee be of good cheer, for thou art as one that walketh among the tombs in the valley of Jehoshaphat ; but the shadows of the night will soon pass away, and may the light which is from Zion be thy comfort !’

“ So terminated this strange conclave of the Jews.”

I need hardly say that I listened to Mr Hartley’s narrative with the deepest attention and interest, revealing as it did a phase of social existence perfectly new to me, and which bore so little resemblance to the usages of our modern times. But the extreme circumstantiality of the story struck me as remarkable.

“ Pardon the interruption, Mr Hartley,” said I ; “ but may I ask how you came to be acquainted with all those particulars, which could only be communicated by a witness of the scene ? ”

“ True, my dear sir. And not only were those particulars communicated, in the first instance, by word of mouth, but they were written down, and are contained in a document in my possession. Its extraordinary character has impressed it deeply on my memory ; and you will hardly doubt of its accuracy when I tell you that Reuben, the servant of Miriam, was the person from whom we purchased the information. Our agents traced him to Germany, whither he had gone immediately after Speedwell’s death ; and when thoroughly assured that his disclosure would not be used to the prejudice of any party, he accepted our terms, and gave us the information we desired. We have many strange documents in our archives relating

to transactions in private life ; but none, I can assure you, more interesting or startling than this."

"It is indeed, as you say, a narrative of absorbing interest. Pray proceed, Mr Hartley."

"One important chapter in this terrible romance, for such I may truly call it," continued Mr Hartley, "is wanting. No one knows, or ever can know, what took place at the interview between the fanatic mother and her guilty and miserable son. Not one word regarding it did she breathe to Reuben ; but when she returned from the prison, after having been there for upwards of two hours, her face was ghastly white, and she trembled in every limb.

" ' I have seen him, Reuben,' she said—' seen him for the last time ! O child of my sorrow, well might I have called thee Benoni, for in anguish wert thou brought forth, and in misery hath thy mother left thee ! But all will soon be over. I go to my chamber to mourn in sackcloth and ashes ; and on the third day thou, Reuben, must get thee to the prison. All is prepared. The men will let thee in without hindrance—thy hand shall give him the fatal draught—and thy face is the last he shall behold in the land of the living. Meanwhile, take this gold and make thee ready ; for thou must pass into a far country and abide there, until the memory of this thing hath gone by.'

"On the day appointed, Reuben, having received his final instructions, repaired to the prison. As Miriam had predicted, no restriction was placed upon the interview, and he was left alone with Speedwell in his cell.

“A fearful change had come over the wretched being. So long as he believed that there was nothing against him but a charge of forgery, the penalty of which he might evade by betraying his accomplices, he had been reckless and defiant ; but now that he stood accused of a far more atrocious crime, and felt that every avenue of escape was closed, he became a prey to the most abject terror. As Reuben entered, he started with a kind of suppressed shriek from the pallet on which he had been grovelling, the cold sweat standing on his brow, and his eyes dilated into a stare of horror ; and so, for a minute’s space, these two men—the messenger of death, and the wretch whose hours were numbered—confronted each other in silence.

“Reuben spoke first.

“‘I come from thy mother, Joseph !’

“‘Ay—from my mother !’ gasped Speedwell. ‘But it is early yet, Reuben—early yet ! See—the sun is still high in the heavens ! O God—it cannot be that this is the hour appointed me to die !’

“‘I have not hastened in my coming, Joseph,’ replied the other. ‘A weight was on my feet, and my knees failed me on the way, for my heart bleeds within me, son of my old master, when I think of the days that are gone by, and the time when you were a little child. Joseph—thou knowest what brings me here ?’

“Speedwell gnashed his teeth.

“‘Man ! I know your purpose. That she-wolf who calls me her son has sent you to take my life before the law has declared it forfeit. Why, the very beasts of

the desert have stronger affections than she has, for they will fight to the death for their young! In a moment of weakness and despair I swore to obey the commandment that she laid upon me. Idiot that I was! For if there is a hell, as the rabbis say, no mother's curse can sink me deeper into perdition; and if there be none, then curses are but as idle wind, and those who fear them are the fools of their own imagination.'

“ ‘ Blaspheme not ! ’ said Reuben, sternly. ‘ That there is a hell thou knowest, for its fires are burning already in thy bosom. Moreover, of this be sure, that whatever may be the doom awarded thee for the sins committed in the flesh, that which awaits the child who has sworn unto his mother and broke his oath, and who goes down into the grave with her curse upon his head, is tenfold more terrible than the other. Blame not the mother that bore thee, because she seeks to rescue thee from shame; but submit thou to that from which there is no way to escape, nor incur a heavier condemnation.’

“ ‘ But Reuben—Reuben—I was mad when I took that oath! I tell you that I knew not what I was doing. Why should I throw away my life while there is yet a chance that it may be saved? Look, man, the evidence may break down. The body was buried long enough to let the poison—if there was any, for I admit nothing, Reuben; no, no, I am too cunning for that!—disappear; and doctors, you know, *will* differ in opinion, and will swear that black is white, if by so

doing they can discredit a rival. An excellent chance, Reuben—an excellent chance! Come now, be reasonable for once, and admit that the chance is excellent!’

“ ‘Vain and miserable delusion!’ said the other. ‘Do thou hear me, Joseph, and mark me well, for I speak the words of forethought and deliberate counsel which the wise have held upon this matter. The meshes of the law are drawn round thee so close, that, save by a miracle, thou canst not escape; and if that miracle were wrought in thy behalf, still would thy end be worse than if thou wert delivered over to the hand of the executioner. Even if the judge were to send thee from the bar, the people would take vengeance into their own hands, and tear thee limb from limb.’

“ ‘And is there no way, Reuben—no other way of escape? It is a terrible thing to die in the prime of manhood, and to go one knows not where!’

“ ‘There is no escape, Joseph, save from open shame! The penalty of death thou canst not evade; but do as thou hast sworn to thy mother, and thou art straightway free from the dungeon, the judgment, and the scaffold. My say is over. Here is what Miriam sends thee. Use it or not as thou wilt—I have fulfilled my mission.’

“ ‘Nay, Reuben, nay! Stay but a little longer, Reuben—it is so horrible to be left alone! I have seen them, Reuben—seen them last night! One—two—three—all of them long ago in their graves! They bent over me in the dark, and though I could not see the wall opposite me for the utter blackness, yet I beheld their faces, pale and livid, and their glazed eye-

balls ! O horror !—the blood froze within my veins ! See how my hand trembles ; that hand which used to be so steady ! Why should men be buried, if their spectres can walk abroad ? Ah—I see it now ! Those devils of doctors have had them up, and let in the light of day to the dark secrets of the grave ! Don't leave me, Reuben—I cannot bear to be alone !'

“ ‘Have you seen this,’ replied Reuben, ‘and know not what it signifies ? I am an unlettered man, but I have heard our rabbis say, that to none do the dead appear save to those for whom the winding-sheet is prepared. On the night before King Saul fell on Mount Gilboa, he beheld the form of Samuel the prophet rising from the earth, and knew that awful messenger had quitted his rest to warn him that his hour was at hand. Since, then, thou hast looked on the faces which none can behold and live, hesitate no longer, but strengthen thyself ; be resolute, and play the man ! See—I will turn my head away ! Speak not until thou hast swallowed the potion.’

“ An awful silence ensued, broken only by the convulsive breathing of Speedwell.

“ At length the empty phial dropped upon the floor.

“ ‘Is it done ?’ said Reuben.

“ ‘It is done !’ gasped Speedwell ; and he fell backwards on his pallet.

“ A quarter of an hour after this, Reuben quitted the prison. When the warder made his evening rounds, Speedwell was found speechless and expiring in his cell.”

So ended Mr Hartley's narrative.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

I AM sure the reader will agree with me in thinking that any detailed account of the further progress of the election in which my friends Carlton and Lumley were chiefly interested, would be absolutely superfluous. Suffice it to say that they fought the battle, as they deemed it, of the constitution very gallantly, and that their efforts were crowned with entire success. Sir Godfrey Norton was beaten by an immense majority ; and the gentleman of doubtful principles found his chance so desperate that he did not even venture to the poll. So the ceremony of chairing was performed with the usual uproar and jubilation, the days of feasting went by, and by degrees we all returned to a state of comparative tranquillity. I suspect that Amy, despite her newly-formed political enthusiasm, was very glad when the termination of the contest left George at liberty to renew his attentions ; for during the campaign, which lasted for nearly six weeks, the unfortunate man had been whisked about,

like one of Ariosto's Paladins, who are compelled to do duty in any part of the world to which the poet may be pleased to despatch them, and are mounted indiscriminately on hippogriffs or the shoulders of volatile demons. Under such circumstances love-making was out of the question, so that a large amount of tender arrears had accumulated. My case was not so bad, yet still I was a considerable defaulter.

Now it occurred to us both that the best way of obtaining a discharge in full was to expedite our marriages ; and as there was now no obstacle, we succeeded in effecting an arrangement whereby the double ceremonies were to take place on the same day, and at Wilbury Church. To this proposition Mr Beaton did not object—on the contrary, he seemed rather relieved by the thought that his presence could be dispensed with on the occasion.

“ Atweel, Mr Norman, ye are better without him, the stiff auld stirk that he is ! ” remarked Davie Osett ; “ but it's an unnatural thing for a man that's no bedrid or a cripple to be absent from his daughter's wedding. But what's this I hear about buying a property ? Is it true that you have become a laird ? ”

“ Even so, Davie. Mr Shearaway has purchased for me Glenvoil, a very beautiful estate in the West Highlands—just the kind of possession upon which I had set my heart.”

“ Long may you enjoy it, Mr Norman ; but I had far rather have seen you settled somewhere on the Border ! ”

“There is no accounting for taste, Davie ; and you know that by birth I am half a Highlander. But wait till you see Glenvoil, and I am sure you will admire it. A splendid sporting country, both for fishing and shooting ; though, to be sure, there are not many pheasants to tempt poachers into the plantations.”

“Nor railroads either, Mr Norman—Aha, I think I hae ye there !”

“Well, to say the truth, I shall not be sorry to spend part of my days undisturbed by the screech of that eternal locomotive ; and I trust it may be some time before your professional services are required to lay out a line through my property.”

“Dinna be too sure of that, Mr Norman ! If the Glenmutchkin Railway should be made, you will maybe have a branch of it at your door.”

“I dare not, in this speculative age, commit myself by a direct prophecy to the contrary. But, Davie, there is one thing that I am very anxious about. My dear old nurse, your aunt Eppie—do you think she could be persuaded to leave the Birkenshaws, and take up her habitation with us ?”

“Will she no ?” replied Davie ; “just try her, and I am sair mistaken if, auld as she is, she wadna hirple after you from Dan even unto Beersheba. I warn ye, though, that she has become a wee thought cantankerous, and kittle to drive—at least my father and her whiles get thegither by the lugs about the doctrine o’ predestination ; and, my word, auntie Eppie has the best o’t ! She dings the gudeman deaf wi’

screeds out of Boston's *Fourfold State*, for she has that at her fingers' ends ; and flytes at him as if he were in the deistical line, instead of being a ruling elder of the Kirk ! ”

“ If she will agree to come to us, I think there is little fear of our engaging in any such knotty disputes. And you, Davie ; do you mean to continue in England ? ”

“ Troth, no ! I have got the offer of a situation as resident engineer in the north ; and I'll e'en finish my business here, and gae back to the land of my nativity. England's a grand country, and I like the English weel. They are no half sae dour as the Scots, and a hantle richer—but hame's aye hame ; and I like to hear the braid sound of my mother tongue. Besides, between you and me, our folk are rather behind-hand, and need redding up ; and they will no be the waur of having twa or three chields among them that have picked up experience elsewhere.”

“ Spoken like a true patriot, Davie ! Too many of our countrymen, after they go south, affect to despise old Scotland, and try to sink their nationality.”

“ De'il pyke out their e'en for a parcel of misbegotten loons ! ” replied Osett. “ There's no an honest Englishman but wad despise them for their dirty meanness. Weel—it's a queer world ! Here are you and I jogging back to where we came frae, as cannily as if we had never left it.”

“ A little more patriarchally, however,” I said. “ I suppose, Davie, when you are fairly settled in your

new situation, you will not be quite oblivious of Selkirk ? ”

“ You may rely upon that, Mr Norman ! Jean Leslie is not the sort of lass that a man can find ilka day at the market.”

Mr Pains, to whom I had intrusted the necessary business arrangements, undertook to make everything square with Mr Beaton, and succeeded entirely to my satisfaction. Indeed an event that took place about this time effected a great change in the feelings and even the prospects of the fallen merchant. Dobbiging was brought to trial for the forgery, and sentenced to transportation, the evidence showing quite clearly that he alone was the deviser of the fraud. The monstrous calumny raised against Mr Beaton was shown to be without any foundation ; and the first men in the City, with that frank generosity which really belongs to their class, though they seldom receive full credit for it, came forward with most liberal offers of assistance. Of these Mr Beaton declined to avail himself, though he regarded them as a high tribute to his honesty of purpose and the integrity of his character. In some walks of life, repeated failure acts rather as a stimulus than otherwise to increased exertion ; but in trade and commerce the case is different. Credit is like personal virtue. Once forfeited, the stigma remains—not entirely to be obliterated by any subsequent course of good conduct. Doubtless Mr Beaton felt that, however successful his career might prove if he were to tarry in London, he would still

be pointed at as the merchant who had failed on 'Change ; and his nature was too sensitive to brook the humiliation of dwelling in the scene of his dishonour. Therefore I was not surprised when I learned through Mr Pains that he had accepted the situation of manager of a bank in one of our most distant but rising colonies—an offer which had been made to him on account of his well-known business ability and vast commercial experience. At the same time I received a message requesting me to wait upon him.

When I arrived at the house, I found his favourite valet busily engaged in the arrangement of packages, which seemed to be ominous of speedy departure. The faithful fellow met my look of interrogation with a miserable attempt at a smile.

“ Yes, sir,” he said ; “ it is quite true. Master is going away, far over the seas, and God knows if he will ever come back. He only told me of it yesterday ; and here am I preparing all his things for that long voyage—more than half round the world, they say—and little time for doing it, because he sails on Tuesday next.”

“ What ! so soon ! ” cried I, in amazement.

“ Not a day later, sir. It seems very strange, and quite like a dream to me, but so it is. And the worst of it is that he will not let me go with him. I know he will never be able to get on without me ; for although he is a very clever man, he has not the least idea of looking after his clothes ; and what he is to do on board ship without some one to help him, I really

cannot think. I never thought to have parted from him, sir, for he has been the best and kindest of masters to me ; but I have a wife and two children, and there is no one to look after them but myself."

"Then it is your duty," said I, "to remain with them at all hazards. Shall I find Mr Beaton in his study?"

"Yes, sir. I believe he expects you."

I entered the room. It was already dismantled, and little remained beyond a few books and papers scattered on the floor. Mr Beaton was tying up some letters, and destroying others.

"So, Sinclair!" he said, in a more friendly tone than he had ever yet used towards me, "you come to bid me good-by. I hate leave-taking in general ; but it would have been scarcely decorous for me to have walked away without shaking hands with my son-in-law that is to be. Poins has told me all about the settlements and so forth, and I am quite satisfied. You have acted very handsomely, considering the extent of your means ; and I wish it were in my power to help you. Perhaps the day may come yet—but it is useless talking of contingencies. So you have bought an estate in Scotland? Well—I am pleased that Mary is to be settled there—far better than if she had remained in London."

"I am sorry, sir, to learn that you intend to depart so soon——"

"No, no—don't say that you are at all sorry, Sinclair! That's sheer hypocrisy, though I suppose you merely use the ordinary words of style. I doubt not

you are very glad to be rid of me ; and the feeling is quite natural, for a bankrupt father-in-law is by no means a creditable connection. Pray now, don't pursue the subject further. I am going, as you may have heard, to transfer myself to the new world—to Australia—where the people won't care much what men may say about me in Lombard Street. I require a fresh place to start in, and I like the prospect. You abandon all idea of engaging in business, I suppose ? That, now, is a thing I cannot understand ; for I have been a working-man all my life, and sooner than bury myself in the country I would become a clerk in a counting-house. But I doubt not you will make an admirable country gentleman—kill your own mutton, shoot your own grouse, attend road-meetings, if there happen to be any roads in the neighbourhood, and be as happy as the day is long. I am sure I wish you to be so."

What could I reply to such a tirade as this ? Mr Beaton, when sprightly, as he intended to be just now, was more perplexing than in his most caustic humour. So I contented myself with bowing an acknowledgment.

"Let me see—have I anything more to say to you ?" continued Mr Beaton. "O yes ! I find that I am entitled to dispose of my library as I please ; so I have ordered the books to be packed up, and forwarded to your address in Scotland. There are, I believe, some good editions of the classics, but I really know little about such matters. Also some old family-plate with

the Beaton crest—the new things have been sent to the hammer—which I wish to leave with Mary. That's all I can do for you in the mean time. Now farewell. I am to see Mary this afternoon—better for us both to get the parting over as soon as possible. I am sure you will be kind to her, Sinclair; and she deserves it. I cannot be at your wedding, but the party will be none the less merry on account of my absence. Farewell! and at parting let me give you one serious piece of advice. Never, as you wish to thrive, let my sister Walton cross the threshold of your door!”

That was my last interview with Mr Beaton; and I could not help thinking, as I went home, that it really was in some sort a blessing that he was about to take his departure. It was clear that he and I could never pull together; and such being the case, it was just as well that the ocean should be placed between us. His parting with Mary partook much more of the pathetic. I asked no questions regarding it; but from what she told me I could gather that he had expressed deep sorrow for his neglect of her mother, and that he was much moved as he kissed and gave her his blessing.

“So old Hurlothrumbo is fairly out of the way!” said Carlton, about a week afterwards. “Perhaps it is a shame to say so, but that circumstance operates upon me as a sensible relief. The old cynic philosopher, at the wedding-feast of Lycius, would scarce have been a grimmer guest. But who is to give away the bride? It would be against all rule for Colonel Stanhope to dispose of both the ladies.”

“That is already provided for, thanks to the kindness of Lord Windermere, who insists upon performing the office. Lady Windermere has added to the obligation by presenting Mary with a most elegant *parure*.”

“That is as it should be. You may have Frank Stanhope for your groomsman if you please. I have already selected Lumley.”

“Not on account of his matrimonial propensities?”

“O, you had best not attempt to be satirical on that subject!” replied Carlton. “All the while that Lumley was regaling us with that pitiful romance about his disappointments and blighted affections, I was saying to myself that a gentleman of such strong susceptibility was as certain ere long to be married as a thrush is to be caught in a net among the strawberries. And so it has turned out. In the course of his peregrinations through the county, Lumley became acquainted with Lady Julia Goring, second daughter of the Marquess of Leominster, a splendid *brunette*, whose accomplishments are not inferior to her personal charms. She is an admirable musician, sings divinely, can ride up to the hounds, doats upon Dante, and is withal as witty and pungent as Beatrice—of course I refer to Shakespeare’s creation, not to the melancholy mistress of the Florentine. Well, sir; the result is that she has fairly captivated our Signor Benedick, who is now most furiously in love; and under the circumstances I thought it but common charity to let him be present at the rehearsal of a ceremony, in which he soon will have to bear a more conspicuous part.”

“Bravo !” cried I. “Every true friend of Lumley’s must rejoice to hear that the spell is broken. But I shall not avail myself of Frank Stanhope’s good offices. Another person has a better claim to stand by me on such an occasion.”

“Whom do you mean ?” asked Carlton.

“Even my foster-brother, David Osett.”

“What! that great rough Scotch surveyor? Upon my word, Sinclair, you must reconsider this! Why, he would be altogether out of place in such an assemblage.”

“I *have* considered the matter, Carlton, and I shall adhere to my purpose. When I was a helpless orphan, his near relative nourished and sustained me. The years of my early boyhood were spent beneath the shelter of his father’s roof. That rough man, as you term him, was my first companion; and since then he has stood by me in every turn of fortune with a devotion that I never can repay. Shall I forget all this; and, because his speech sounds uncouth to English ears, and his manner lacks the degree of refinement that finds favour in the drawing-room, shall I turn my back upon him on the day that is to render me happy, and banish from my side the man I would have summoned there in the hour of difficulty or danger? No, Carlton! There are ties so strong that no conventionalities can unloose them. I would despise myself, and all good men ought to despise me, if, from any such wretched considerations, I were to cast a slight upon him.”

“Nay, when you place the matter in such a light,” said Carlton, “I cannot gainsay you. Nevertheless, there is something in usage ; and I cannot help thinking that there is incongruity in coupling Lumley with your friend, considering the very peculiar circumstances of their first acquaintance. All you have said is strictly correct and proper, and would secure the acquiescence of every one acquainted with your personal history ; but it is impossible in such a case to make general explanations. May I ask if you have informed Mr Osett of your intention ? ”

“Not yet. But I certainly shall do so.”

“By all means, since you feel so strongly. But from the scanty opportunities I have had of observing him, it strikes me that he is a person by no means destitute of discretion, and perhaps his view may prove to be a little more practical than your own.”

Carlton was right ; for Davie met the proposal with a decided negative.

“Hoots—nonsense, Mr Norman !” he said. “It’s very kind of you to think of me ; but it’s no my place to be thrusting mysel’ forward among the gentles and grandees at sic a time. A bonny figure I wad cut returning thanks for the health of the bridesmaids, and a sair skirling there wad be if I tried to kiss them, according to wont and privilege ! There’s a fitness to be observed in a’ things—nae man kens that better than I do—and you’ll no catch me putting mysel’ in the way to be gecked at, or making you ashamed by my hamely manners. I ken my ain place. A cart-

horse is no for a curricie ; sae ye maun just think nae mair about it. I'll be there though, gin you'll let me, to see the wedding ; but fient a bit o' me will cock mysel' up amang earls and colonels, and the like ! ”

As Osett was inflexible in his resolution, not a little to the contentment of Carlton, it was agreed that Frank Stanhope should officiate as my supporter.

At length the eventful morn arrived ; and in the little church at Wilbury good old Dr Wayles solemnised our union. Mary Beaton gave me her hand ; and the fondest wish and aspiration of my heart was realised.

Since then years have gone by, and we are still in that Highland home which we regard as a paradise, and voices of children in the hall make the place more cheerful than before. Sometimes we pay a short visit to our friends in England—to Lord Lumley, who is now a peer of the realm, and a most devoted husband ; and to the Carltons, who have ever held a first place in our affections—but we are always glad to return to the land of the mountain and the lake. We have been mercifully dealt with, for our sorrows have been very few ; and the one calamity that threw us into mourning was so wrapped up in mystery that the shock of it was sensibly diminished. The vessel in which Mr Beaton sailed for Australia never reached its destination. No traces of it were ever seen. It might have foundered at sea ; it might have been destroyed by fire ; it might have been cast away on the savage coast of Africa—all possible, but all conjectural. Phantom-

like did the fated ship, and every soul on board of her, melt away from mortal vision in the midst of the illimitable ocean.

Little more remains to be told. Eppie Osett joyfully accepted my invitation, and was installed in comfortable quarters in the house ; but she did not remain there long. In the first place, a desperate feud arose between her and the housekeeper touching some doctrinal point which I never could be brought to understand ; and as the denominations to which they respectively belonged were as nearly as possible identical, the small variation of tenets became magnified into a hideous heresy. In the second place, Eppie conceived a violent dislike to the gamekeeper, a colossal fiery-whiskered Celt, whose principal recreations were playing on the bagpipes and dancing strathspeys in the kitchen — practices which, in Eppie's opinion, were exceedingly sinful, worthy of reprobation in this world, and certain to receive punishment in the next. In the third place, she manifested a disposition to interfere much more than was at all desirable in the management of the household, the consequence of which was a general insurrection of the servants. As the only means of restoring peace, I proposed to Eppie that she should become for the future the occupant of the lodge, where she might rule without contradiction or restraint, and develop the mental capacities of her one help and subject, a young Highland girl, shy as a ptarmigan or a mountain kid, and declared by the village schoolmistress to be impregnable to the influences of civilisa-

tion. To this proposition my old nurse readily agreed and the peace that followed was complete.

Davie Osett rose rapidly in his profession ; and, having by industry and judicious investments amassed a considerable fortune, has built for himself a villa near Kelso, where he keeps a hospitable table, presided over by the *ci-devant* Miss Leslie, now a buxom and, comely matron. Having paid us more than one visit, he has got over his prejudice against the Highlands, but still insists that a railway, with a station about a hundred yards from the house, would be a valuable adjunct to the property.

Once only was I tempted to exchange the tranquil mode of life which I had voluntarily embraced, for a more active and stirring career. On the eve of one of those political changes which are now so common that we look for them as for fluctuations of the tide, I received a letter from Lord Windermere strongly urging me to go into Parliament, and assuring me that, if I would agree to do so, my return for an English borough would be secured. I read the letter attentively ; and then, without saying a word, handed it to old Mr Shearaway, who happened at that time to be my guest, for perusal. The experienced agent conned it over with the utmost deliberation.

“What think you of that proposal, Mr Shearaway ?” said I.

“It matters very little what I think, Norman. In an affair of this sort a man must be directed by his own judgment.”

“Doubtless ; but in the first instance I would fain have the benefit of your view.”

“Well, then, Norman, answer me this. If you were to go into Parliament, would it be from inclination or a sense of duty ?”

“Not from inclination, certainly,” I replied. “I have no ambition that way. My experience of public life leads me neither to covet its honours nor to court its responsibility.”

“Then do you just remain as you are!” said Shear-away. “Duty has its claims upon every man, but it is time enough to obey her call when she presents herself at your door. If you were asked to undertake the representation of your own county, it might be a different matter ; but to enter Parliament as nominee for an English borough is just to fling yourself into the swirl of politics without rhyme or reason.”

“Thanks for your candour, my good old friend ! I think it probable that we shall both arrive at the same conclusion ; but before returning a decisive answer to Lord Windermere I must take an hour for reflection.”

I went to our little garden overlooking the lake. Mary was sitting in her bower watching the children, who were playing on the green. It was a delicious summer evening. Not a breath of air wrinkled the surface of the water, and against the glowing sky the purple mountains stood out in bold relief. From the neighbouring wood came the doling of the cushat, and the roe-deer glided from the coppice.

I sate down beside Mary, and took her hand in mine.

“ We have been very happy here, Mary.”

“ Ah, yes—so happy, Norman! happier than we could have been elsewhere.”

“ Then you feel no inclination to make a change—no desire to return to the gay world of London?”

“ None whatever. But why do you ask, Norman?”

“ Because if you wish for it, dearest, that change is within your power.”

“ O Norman! surely you do not purpose to leave Glenvoil!”

“ Not unless that step should meet with your approbation, Mary. Listen to me. I have received a letter from Lord Windermere assuring me of a seat in the House of Commons. If I accept, I must, as a matter of course, renounce the country, and permanently settle in London. What would you have me do?”

Mary paused for a few moments.

“ Norman, my husband!” she said, “ if in your heart you feel an impulse towards a more active life, or if you are constrained by a sense of duty, accept the offer, and let no wish or inclination of mine weigh for a moment in the balance. To quit this beloved spot, where we have lived so long and so happily, would, I know, be a sore trial to both of us; but if it must be done, God forbid that I should repine.”

“ Mary, there was a time when you would gladly have seen me engage in a public career!”

“ Ah, Norman, but then I was neither wife nor mother!”

“ I am answered!” cried I. “ Come to my heart,

darling ! and of this be sure, that no ambition shall tempt me to forego the happiness I possess, or bring a shade of sorrow to your cheek. The busy world without shall not involve us in its cares, or ensnare us by its temptations. Beloved wife and true companion ! here let us live and die ! ”

THE END.



